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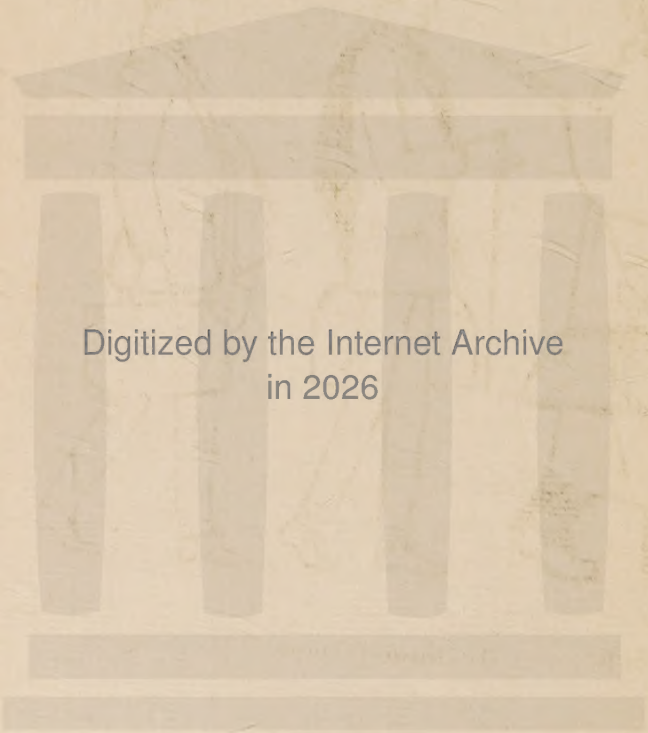

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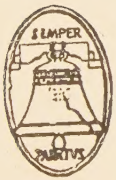
THE NEW DECAMERON

VOLUME THE FIRST, CONTAINING
THE PROLOGUE & THE FIRST DAY



NEW YORK
ROBERT M. McBRIDE & CO.
1919

CONTENTS

			PAGE
THE PROLOGUE			1
THE PRIEST'S TALE	THE JOURNEYMAN	*By Dorothy L. Sayers*	25
THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S TALE	THE BEAST WITH FIVE FINGERS	*By W. F. Harvey*	29
THE SCHOOLMARM'S TALE	A NEAR THING	*By Helen Hamilton*	72
THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S TALE	MOTHER-LOVE	*By M. Storm-Jameson*	78
THE PROFESSOR'S TALE	THE PALMARY EXAMPLE	*By Bill Nobbs*	105
THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S TALE	THE STONE HOUSE AFFAIR	*By M. Nightingale*	112
THE MASTER-PRINTER'S TALE	THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH BINNS	*By Basil Blackwell*	169
THE BUREAUCRAT'S TALE	THE UPPER ROOM	*By Sherard Vines*	178
THE LADY OF FASHION'S TALE	THE TUMBRIL TOUCH	*By Michael Sadler*	189
THE COURIER'S TALE	A MEMORY OF PARIS DAYS	*By Francis Carco*	217
THE SONG	THE EXPLORER	*By D. E. A. Wallace*	225
BIBLIOGRAPHY			227

THE NEW DECAMERON

HAVE YOU A TEMPERAMENT?

IF you regard Europe as a Bun to be bolted, leaving Digestion to chance

IF you wish to travel in herds in the wake of a bleating Bell-wether

IF you like to be the Laughing-stock of every place you visit

DO NOT READ THIS!

BUT

IF you wish to see strange lands in a Dignified and Leisurely manner

IF you desire to journey in Congenial Company

IF, in fact, you are Truly Cosmopolitan

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HECTOR TURPIN ESQ.,
126(4) Victoria St. 126(4)
London S.W.

Telephone: Victoria 1001

will elicit full particulars of:

TURPIN'S TEMPERAMENTAL TOURS

THE PROLOGUE

I

TOWARDS the middle of July 1913 the advertisement shown on the previous page appeared prominently in the leading daily and educational papers.

Miss Amelia Pogson read it in the *School World* at break, while she was sipping the regulation glass of milk, and it struck her as suggesting a new and adventurous method of spending the summer holidays. Feeling that Miss Straker, the second mistress, would not countenance the scheme for a moment, she hastily concealed the journal among the IV.B arithmetic examination papers which she was taking home to correct.

Barnabas MacWhirter-Smith, professor of Zend language and literature in the University of Oxford, read it in the *Times* while breakfasting in his sunny room overlooking the large quad in Gamaliel College, and would perhaps have read it aloud to his friend and guest Henry Scott, of the Psychical Research Society, had not toast and Oxford marmalade impeded his utterance. As it was, he handed the paper across the table, being careful to mark with his thumb the space occupied by the unusual announcement.

It caught the eye of the Rev. Anthony Sheppard —or, as he liked to be called, Father Anthony— at the moment when he was laying aside the *Church Times* (already nearly a week old) to read his evening letters. He sighed a little as he glanced round his ascetic and squalid sitting-room, lit by the uncompromising glare of a single incandescent burner. The suggestion was so ironically apt. The heart specialist had told him several days before that, if he did not immediately take a long holiday, there was more than a likelihood of his having to give up altogether the East End work for which he lived. Resolutely he took up the first envelope from the little pile on the table beside him. The contents were startling. A letter and a newspaper cutting: the former from his old friend and patron, Lady Grimstone, the latter a duplicate of the advertisement he had that moment so wistfully rejected.

"DEAR FATHER ANTHONY," the letter read, "that idiot Pakenham tells me he has ordered you two months abroad. As if, even if you had the money, you would spend it on anything but your absurd costermongers! I saw the enclosed and sent the Turpin creature a cheque, telling him to book you for his astonishing tour which starts on AUGUST THE FIRST. So now you have *got* to go! Victoria; 9.30 in the morning. Enjoy yourself, and *don't forget*!

"CHARLOTTE GRIMSTONE."

Mr. Alfred Buck, Master-Printer, now retired,

read the advertisement in the train. He always bought the *Daily News* when he went by train, which was often enough now that " Castle Dene " (in red brick, with battlements and a Gothic porch) was nearing completion on the desirable residential site ten miles to the west of the country town where he had made his modest pile. The word " temperament " pleased him. He saw himself boasting of his travel experiences in bar-parlours and at Masonic dinners. " That ought to settle old Buggins ! " he grunted.

Peter Brown, amiable and artistic, seeking in a sunny window of the Junior Carlton consolation after an unprofitable morning in his studio, read Turpin's announcement in the *Westminster*, and was agreeably surprised to find his lazily wandering attention so firmly tethered. " Admirable ! " he said aloud, and then, seeing Vivian Spencer, an old college friend and now in the Foreign Office, entering the room, hailed him to share the joke.

" Just look at this, Vivian," said he. " I was just lamenting that life was real, life was earnest and altogether without artistic opportunities, and here was this unique promise of adventure waiting for me all the time. Delightful ! The fellow's so clearly a lunatic. Let's ring him up."

Finally, Mr. Turpin's snare entangled the attention of Mary Pennock, M.D., reading the paper in her landaulette as she set out on her morning's round. It was barely two years since

Doctor Pennock had bought a partnership in a Kensington practice and had left the North Riding village in which until and since her father's death she had lived and worked. She had short grey hair, a determined chin, and a maze of kindly wrinkles about the eyes. She tended to abruptness in manner, and was an abject admirer of efficiency. Method was her divinity; her engagements were dovetailed one into the other to save time, mental effort, and petrol. Holidays were an essential feature of her yearly round, because, without holidays, human power for work is lessened. This year, by arrangement with her partner, she was to take August and perhaps some fragment of September. Already July was drawing on, and she had made no plans. She was not of the kind that can drift into holiday; everything must be scheduled in advance. Into Mr. Turpin's alluring vulgarities she read primarily "organisation," and organisation carried out by some one else. Secondarily, but only secondarily, she felt a grim curiosity as to the nature of this flamboyant courier. Doctors are by necessity students of human nature. Turpin's Tour promised one unusual specimen at least. "If the dates suit," she decided, "I will go; then I shall have no more worry." The chauffeur, instructed through the speaking tube, drew up at a telegraph office.

II

Miss Pogson took a bus from her North London lodgings to Victoria Street. It was Saturday

morning, the day following the appearance of the advertisement of Turpin's Temperamental Tour. The life of a High School mistress is not often a life of adventure, and Miss Pogson, at thirty-five, looked back on a career unvaried by anything that could even be termed an episode. The prospect of a European tour awed her to breathlessness. She felt herself on the verge of the unknown; on the threshold of reckless enterprise. As she climbed the dirty stairs of 126 Victoria Street (even in 1913 more than one of the gaunt and dingy blocks that lined that thoroughfare were liftless), the dirty hand-rail soiled her white cotton glove. Groping her way along a dark passage on the fourth floor she reached a glass-paned door bearing the legend:

HECTOR TURPIN

B. ès L. (Paris), B.A. (Oxon),
Ph.D. (St. Louis)

BUREAU OF TURPIN'S TEMPERAMENTAL TOUR

(*On parle français*)

Knock and enter.

Miss Pogson's disciplined mind responded to the imperative. She knocked and entered—or rather sought to enter, but the door would not yield.

Annoyed, she gave the handle a violent wrench, at the same time thrusting her knee strongly against the lower panel. The door flew open and she found herself in the arms of a stout gentleman, slightly bald, whose embrace was clearly a hasty improvisation based on the courtly gesture with which he had prepared to welcome the visitor. Miss Pogson's pince-nez flew off; the stout gentleman gulped. They recovered themselves simultaneously.

"Oh—I *beg* your pardon!"

"Mille pardons, madame!"

"My door, like my tour," continued Mr. Turpin, "has temperament. I trust you are not hurt?"

"You are Mr. Turpin?" inquired Miss Pogson, after retrieving her pince-nez and while wondering whether the cracking sound, audible as she stooped, was the kind that showed, or indicated some more intimate but more discreet disaster.

The stout gentleman bowed. He seemed about forty-five. His gestures had an indefinable "something" about them. Miss Pogson felt herself in the presence of a man of the world.

"Pray be seated, madame. Whom have I the honour to address?"

"I am Miss Pogson. I have read your advertisement and have come to make inquiries."

"*Parfaitement.* Madame does not wish to travel like the common herd. It is obvious that madame has distinction; that madame is—how shall I say?—*different!*"

He spoke with ponderous animation, and rather preciously. His clothes were expensive, but curiously continental in style. His face was very pale and his moustache appeared to be gauffred.

Miss Pogson eyed him with alarm, but his last words had secretly delighted her. She had always flattered herself on this very "difference," which he (but hitherto no one else) had noticed. "I have always thought I looked nicest in white," she said to herself, and for a second her glance strayed to her black stockings and serviceable shoes. To her horror she observed that Mr. Turpin's gaze was similarly directed. But she did him cruel injustice when she allowed the memory to flash across her mind of an article on the White Slave Traffic in a magazine confiscated from a member of the lower fifth. In reality, Mr. Turpin was depressed. "If they are all like this . . . !" he was thinking. But business was business, and he launched into a glowing account of the projected tour.

"Paris!" he cried, raising his hands and his eyes to the apparently uninspiring ceiling. "Paris! Rome! Let the vulgar tourist gape at Notre Dame and climb the Tour Eiffel! Let the common vandal scratch his name on the Arch of Constantine! For Turpin's Temperamental Tourists rarer sights are in store—the haunts of artists and grisettes, the secrets of the vie de Bohème, le Café d'Enfer . . . Musées secrets . . ." his voice sank to a whisper. Miss Pogson, at once thrilled and terrified, rose agitatedly.

"Who else?" she quavered; "who else is going . . .?"

Mr. Turpin hesitated. All her awful memories returned. She saw herself trapped. She was about to hurl herself at the door when he spoke.

"It is professional etiquette, madame," he said, "to respect the confidence of clients. But I am a man of honour and—I think I may say—a man of the world as well. A young and—if I am not impertinent—charming lady is naturally cautious of embarking on such a journey as the one proposed. Wherefore I consider myself justified in disclosing to you that the Reverend Anthony Sheppard of S. Sepulchre's, Hoxton, will be of our party. Of Father Anthony and his goodness you have doubtless heard. Let his name be my voucher."

Miss Pogson was not aware of Father Anthony's existence, but felt that this was not the time to say so. Also she was reassured, partly by the prospect of clerical company, partly by the discriminating epithets which Mr. Turpin had applied to herself.

"How much will the tour cost?" she asked timidly.

"Thirty pounds, madame," replied Mr. Turpin promptly.

This was more than Miss Pogson had meant to pay. "Back out while there is time!" urged Conscience and Economy. "The chance of a lifetime!" urged the Spirit of Adventure. Before her eyes danced the vision of brilliantly lighted

restaurants, of glittering wine, of romantic forests, of virgin snows; in her ears sang valses tziganes, the murmur of brooks, the music of alien tongues. The savings of years of drudgery would be dissipated. Well, what if they were! For this once she would see life! Even if the rest of her days were to be spent in slavery, she would never lose these weeks of intoxicating memory.

"I will send the money," she said steadily. "When do we start?"

Henry Scott (of the Psychical Research Society) read the portion of the *Times* indicated by the Professor, and his bright little eyes twinkled appreciatively.

"An original without a doubt," he said. "And originals are none too common these days. He should be an interesting person, this Turpin. Evidently he has timed his tour for the summer holiday convenience of the academic and business world. I wonder who will go. Earnest women and vegetarian stockbrokers and dons. . . . *Dons!* Colleagues of yours!"

The Professor's mouth was once more in talking trim.

"I almost blush to tell you, my dear Scott, but as I absorbed the meaning of that most unconventional advertisement, it did just cross my mind . . ."

"You're never going yourself?"

"'Going,' is rather forcible. I am not one to rush blindfold into adventure. I have my work to consider. But it had been my intention

this Easter to go to Greece with a tour specially arranged for those of classical interests, and indeed I should have made the journey—the vessel, if I am not mistaken, was most appropriately named the *Argonaut*—had not the demise—or rather the approaching demise—of a distant relative from whom I had—er—anticipations most inopportunely intervened. Being, therefore, as it were defrauded—no, I am uncharitable; for, after all, I inherited that sideboard yonder and several quite valuable books from the—er—interruption—being, let me say, precluded from——"

"In other words you *are* thinking of going on this Turpin Tour?" interrupted the Psychical Researcher. "Then I will go with you. I may meet with curious experiences. At least I can obviate the worst results of your appalling absence of mind. I will write for particulars immediately."

Peter Brown had a dinner engagement in Mayfair. It was not of his own seeking, for not willingly was he involved in any social function, but his *naïveté* and proverbial kindliness made him a popular victim whenever a breach had to be filled. And, fitting his studs into a clean shirt on the evening of his telephoning to Hector Turpin, he for once forgot the burden of his virtues in reviewing with cheerful complacence the doings of the afternoon. Mr. Turpin on the telephone had been all graciousness. Fifty pounds a head. Certainly a lot of money, but what would Mon-

sieur? The unique is never cheap. Surely any one of Mr. Brown's discrimination would not look to have the problem of travel solved for a few sous? There had been a little trouble with Spencer. The ass maintained that with three weeks' leave one could not take six weeks abroad. It had required five minutes' steady argument to convince him that it was always possible to break off a tour in the middle. Peter grinned at the remembrance. He had, of course, no intention of letting his friend return prematurely, but these official beggars always made such a fetish of rules and dates. For the present it was politic to affect respect, and in the future a little manœuvring was all that was necessary. After all, wisdom is justified of her children. And Vivian, quite undeceived by the insincerity of his friend's come-home-in-the-middle compromise, had yielded to persuasion simply because a prolonged resistance to Peter's pleasant persistency was too exhausting for mid-July. He agreed to book himself for this outrageous tour, reserving further judgment until the time for it arrived.

So it had been arranged, and Messrs. Brown and Spencer had posted their cheques and pledged themselves to turn up at Victoria on August 1st at 9.30.

"Peter," said his hostess, who was large and pink, "you are to take Mrs. Dane-Vereker down to dinner. Be nice to her, because she has just had her summer visits upset by divorce, or chicken pox, and is naturally a little disconsolate."

Mrs. Dane-Vereker was certainly nice to look at. Peter had heard of her—a rich young widow of thirty-five or thereabouts—but had never seen her before. They chattered foolishly, his simplicity charming her rather wistful elegance as it charmed so many women weary with self-indulgence. Peter was never blasé; his social secret was his slight gaucherie, his ready interest. Characteristically he plunged unto his partner's distresses.

"I hear you are stranded for the summer."

"Yes. Too annoying. And I had it so beautifully arranged. Now two links in the chain are broken, and I don't know what to do. I have let Claughton for the summer; Mount Street is all but shut up. I suppose I must go to Margate or Clacton and eat shrimps."

"Come on this tour!" Peter was nothing if not generous. In his moral code there was only one treatment for a good idea, and without hesitation he produced his snipping from the club *Westminster*. "When you have read the advertisement you won't be able to refuse."

Mrs. Dane-Vereker absorbed the fragment of green paper. Peter watched her anxiously.

"But where is he taking them to?" she asked.

There was a moment's pause. "He said something about a yacht and Paris and Prague, on the telephone," Peter said at last.

His apologetic air provoked the lady to laughter.

"You have enterprise," she said. "I take it you are going?"

"Oh, of course! And Vivian Spencer—you

know Vivian Spencer? He's in the Foreign Office."

"Who else?"

Peter shook his head.

"Haven't the ghost of an idea. That's the charm of it. Consider the endless possibilities. Some village Hampden, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"Supposing it's all a fake?" asked Mrs. Dane-Vereker. Her voice became suddenly reflective. "Still, I imagine I could take Amélie." She had evidently forgotten her own question, for she sat thinking a moment. Then she shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"All right. I believe I'll come. It should be something new, anyway. I'll ring up Mr. Turpin to-morrow."

III

Hector Turpin was shrewd, for all his affectations, his flamboyance, his Gallicisms. When he came to take stock of the prospects of his tour, he felt that, on the whole, they were financially satisfactory, and the financial aspect was the most essential one. Had all the applicants been Miss Pogsons, things might have been different, for thirty pounds a head is not much when one has the ideas and methods of a Napoleon of tourism. But he had named the sum to Miss Pogson as the limit of her endurance. Lady Grimstone, on the other hand, who had made it clear on the telephone that she wished as an act of religion to give her dear Father Anthony a holiday, had been charged

sixty guineas. A letter from Henry Scott, written from Balliol on his own behalf and on behalf of Professor MacWhirter-Smith, implied scholarship and moderate means. Forty pounds a head. Mr. Peter Brown, speaking from the Junior Carlton in a voice of debonair youthfulness, was clearly good for fifty. Dr. Pennock's telegram, with its firm wording and prepaid reply, suggested forty-five pounds, but good value for the money. A raucous and aggressive visit from Mr. Buck in a deplorable ulster had made it impossible, without insulting his visitor, for Mr. Turpin to put the price below seventy-five pounds. The worthy Master-Printer had left no doubts of his solvency; indeed, he paid on the spot in notes and gold. Nevertheless, Mr. Turpin's anxieties were not finally dissipated until a footman, on behalf of Mrs. Dane-Vereker of 40 Mount Street, telephoned for particulars and prices for Mrs. Dane-Vereker and her French maid. Might Mr. Turpin speak to the lady herself? In his most charming manner he explained to Mrs. Dane-Vereker that the presence of a personal servant—especially of the female sex—complicated matters somewhat; but that he was willing to undertake the responsibility and do all that man could to make the tour a pleasant one for—one hundred guineas. Mrs. Dane-Vereker—like Miss Pogson—hesitated. Then—this time like Miss Pogson upside down—she contemplated the prospect of a miserable summer in solitary hotel-luxury, and allowed its distastefulness to outweigh all other considerations. She agreed.

On nearly five hundred pounds Mr. Turpin could therefore confidently count. He had spent the best part of a hundred pounds on his advertisement. Would the balance suffice? It was to be hoped so; otherwise——? He smiled gently to himself. One could hardly imagine Lady Grimstone allowing her favourite priest or Mrs. Dane-Vereker her own precious person to be marooned in some obscure corner of the Caucasus for the want of another hundred pounds. The tour was a private speculation of Turpin's. He was not set upon making a profit on this first occasion so much as on gaining notoriety. Provided he could pay expenses and net a moderate percentage, he would be satisfied. He felt that his genius was on trial. A success now and wealth was assured.

Let history show whether or not Mr. Turpin's faith in his genius was well founded. Certainly he had ideas. In the first place (and this proves that even efficient women doctors can miscalculate), he had made no plans whatever beyond those necessary to get his party to the shores of France. Organisation was foreign to his nature. A plebiscite should decide the route; the cosmopolitan courtesy on which he prided himself should do the rest. The measures actually taken were, (1) the engagement of a first-class saloon on the morning express to Folkestone from Victoria for August 1st; (2) the borrowing of a yacht for the channel crossing. Perhaps "borrowing" is hardly the word. These were the facts. In addition to the nine clients already encountered,

there awaited the party, somewhere in the future, a tenth—a poet. This poet was an orphan, and faced an unfriendly world with no dower but a nodding acquaintance with the muse and a steam yacht, the former cultivated during many a midnight, the latter bequeathed, as a sort of bitter joke, by a facetious and unreconciled parent in his will. The poet was so bad a sailor that he could not cross the channel at all, much less enjoy his legacy. Having encountered Turpin at Caen, when the scheme of the tour was but recently conceived, he had offered the use of his yacht for the convenience of the journey in return for permission to accompany whatever party might be formed on their European travels. So Turpin got a yacht and the poet six weeks' board and lodging, an arrangement eminently satisfactory to all concerned. Where the poet then was, or where he hoped to join the party, Mr. Turpin did not know. How could he, seeing that the poet had made no sign for weeks and that the whereabouts of the party itself at any given time was undetermined? But Turpin trusted to good fortune; the muse would lead her servitor aright; and, after all, the yacht (more important than its owner) was safely moored in Folkestone harbour.

IV

The train roared through the hop country. Hector Turpin, from one of the crossways seats of the saloon, beamed on his party. The party, while striving to appear at ease, eyed each other

distrustfully. The only person entirely self-possessed was Mrs. Dane-Vereker, who unashamedly occupied two seats, and suggested a beautiful tent of silk and tulle pitched in a field of illustrated papers. On the spare seat by her side, on the floor at her small and perfectly shod feet, were scattered the *Sketch*, the *Tatler*, the *Bystander*, *Punch*, the *Smart Set*, *Blackwood's*, the *Cornhill*, the *Illustrated London News*, the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic*, *Country Life*, the *Field*, the *Queen*, the *Lady*, and *Vogue*. Also by her side were a crocodile leather dressing-case, a gold chain vanity bag, a silk motoring scarf; behind her back was an air cushion in a leather case; on her head slanted a large black hat; round her neck was a ruche fastened under one ear with a brilliant knot of artificial flowers, and below this hung a tortoise-shell lorgnon on a gold chain; in her tiny and bejewelled hands she held, not one of the multifarious papers Amélie had purchased at Victoria, but the *Maxims of La Rochefoucauld*, printed in very black type on very white paper, and published by a fashionable bookseller in Piccadilly.

Father Anthony, fingering the cross on his watch-chain, gazed through the window at the flying fields.

Peter Brown was trying desperately hard to put Miss Pogson at her ease. The Schoolmarm sat well forward, absorbing Mrs. Dane-Vereker's costume with nervous disapproval, and only listening to her companion's well-meaning platitudes in the intervals between pricing one garment

and passing on to the next. She wished she was not wearing her purple tam-o-shanter. Somehow the atmosphere was not right for tam-o-shanters. The Dolly Varden, with the back-trimming of wallflowers and forget-me-nots, would have more sweetly harmonised with the *insouciance* of the moment.

Vivian Spencer was arguing about public health with Doctor Pennock. He patently knew nothing of the subject, but he was a ready improvisor, and she enjoyed the cigarettes he offered her, so that the conversation continued, as it were, for reasons of policy.

Professor MacWhirter-Smith, with a huge dictionary upon his knee, heeded neither the constraint nor the chatter of the rest of the saloon. After shaking hands absently with Mr. Turpin at Victoria he had lost himself in Zend reveries and spoken no further word.

Henry Scott was reading *Mind*. The Master-Printer, his legs thrust out in front of him, a large cigar between his lips, simulated absorption in a series of black pocket-books, which he opened longways, strapping down the pages as he turned them with the black elastic band that held each book together. But between the licks at his stubby pencil and the frowning entries in his dog's-eared pocket-books, he cast hostile and suspicious glances at Mrs. Dane-Vereker, who, he obscurely felt, was purposely not noticing that he wore a dickey.

Nevertheless constraint could not last for ever.

By the time the party were seated at an early lunch on board the poet's yacht, conversation was more or less general. Mr. Turpin's agilities and tact, Father Anthony's Christian charity, Peter Brown's unfailing cheerfulness, Mrs. Dane-Vereker's brilliant smile and appealing helplessness, Doctor Pennock's practical common sense, Henry Scott's general self-effacement—all these combined to melt the frigidity and soften the angularities of the miscellaneous company. Miss Pogson, under the influence of a glass of claret, told daring anecdotes of dormitory life. Mr. Buck, under the influence of quite a lot of whisky, interlarded his conversation with so many printing technicalities that the ladies of the party fortunately failed to grasp the significance of more than one of his jokes.

By two o'clock they were all on deck, enjoying sunshine and a cool breeze. Suddenly Mr. Turpin was summoned by the captain of the vessel. A breakdown; an enforced wait of several hours. Mr. Turpin was desolated. He was shamed in the eyes of his guests. To meet the crisis he produced one of his ideas.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "centuries ago a group of noble Florentines, driven by plague to idleness and to the company of one another, beguiled the tedium of their days by telling stories. Our present situation is not—God be blessed!—the outcome of plague. I hope also I interpret your feelings if I protest against the use of the word 'tedium'? But we are a company of varied talent and distinction; by ill-

fortune we are condemned to a period of immobility. Is it too much to expect that between us we can produce stories of diversity and charm? I propose that we emulate Boccaccio's characters, and each relate in turn some tale, grave or gay, short or long, true or imaginary."

There was a moment of silence. Then, Peter Brown, ready as always to make things go, gave enthusiastic support to the idea.

"Excellent!" he cried. "Mr. Turpin, you are a genius! Who will begin?"

This time the silence might have been interpreted as one of bashfulness. It was broken from an unexpected quarter.

"There would be nothing anti-mediæval in asking Father Anthony to begin, would there?"

Mrs. Dane-Vereker flashed her wonderful smile round the listening company.

"A sort of intercession with the God of Criticism?" suggested the Bureaucrat flippantly.

"No, Mr. Spencer; I meant nothing so irreverent. Father Anthony can best set the company an example in kindliness."

The Priest bowed.

"You are too good, my dear lady. But I am willing to do my best, if it is the general wish that I should tell a story. Only I crave indulgence —first for my cloth, which demands that my tale be sacred or semi-sacred; second for my private fad of ballad-mongering, to gratify which I will set my story in verse."

Mr. Turpin once more took the word.

"Father Anthony is courtesy itself. But be-

fore he begins, and to save at least my own poor mind from overstrain, I would put forward the suggestion that we decide roughly on the order of narration, so that some reflection in advance be possible. . . ."

"There is an eerie story in my head which you are welcome to hear as soon as Father Anthony is finished," said Henry Scott quietly.

"Put me last!" begged Mrs. Dane-Vereker. "I never told a story in my life!"

Miss Pogson giggled, but the others were past that kind of joke.

"Place aux dames!" declared Mr. Turpin. "Nevertheless, as Courier, it is more fitting that I close the day's entertainment. If madame will permit . . .? Perhaps Miss Pogson will give her sex the lead."

The Schoolmarm preened herself. A tam-o-shanter can cover a brain as good as or better than that under a picture hat. She would put the *mannequin* in her place. (Or "its" place? *Le* mannequin. Most confusing. Surely not "his"? In future she would think in English.)

"I dare say I can think of something," she said airily.

"Spencer shall come next!" cried Peter Brown. "He's quite a good hand at spinning yarns."

"I can at least avoid nautical jargon!" grumbled the Bureaucrat. "But in any case I don't want to come on till later. Perhaps Doctor Pennock would be good enough to relate a medical experience."

The Woman-Doctor nodded. "All right," she said placidly.

"Would the Professor next . . . ?" queried Father Anthony.

The learned gentleman had vanished.

"He's below," said Henry Scott, without emotion, "inventing roots. I think we might manage to get him gossiping at tea. It will be about tea-time when Doctor Pennock has told her tale. Food always loosens old Smith's tongue, and he rambles on entertainingly enough. The job is to stop him. How would it be to regard him as following Doctor Pennock—in expectation, at least?"

The company agreed.

"After tea," proposed the Courier, "Mr. Peter Brown will perhaps lead off."

Peter grinned feebly, in a sudden turmoil of diffidence.

"Anything you like," he said, "though I warn you I'm no good."

"And then Mr. Buck?"

The Master-Printer grunted. For a second it looked as though he might spit reflectively. Instead he blew his nose.

"You'll get no frills and furbelows from me. If you want a plain tale about plain folk, maybe I can manage it; but——"

Mrs. Dane-Vereker yawned delicately. Peter, seeing the danger, took upon himself to thank Mr. Buck for his offer and to thrust his friend Spencer into the breach.

"Vivian *must* come in there," he concluded

triumphantly. "There are only Mrs. Dane-Vereker and Mr. Turpin left, and they have reserved their places."

The Bureaucrat shrugged resignedly. The Lady of Fashion pouted and settled her skirt more harmoniously in line.

"Anything may have happened by the time my turn comes," she murmured.

"But nothing that can defraud us of the pleasure of listening to your tale, madame!" declared the Courier gallantly. Then, turning to the assembly, he raised his voice. "The procedure now being settled, I call upon Father Anthony to relate

THE PRIEST'S TALE"

THE JOURNEYMAN

"MAKE haste, good Master Carpenter,
To carve the beams for S. Saviour's shrine,
For the Bishop cometh at Holy Rood feast
To break the wafer and bless the wine.

"Set up the pillars of golden oak,
For Trinity-tide wanes out right late;
In three days' time cometh Holy Rood mass,
When S. Saviour's Church shall be consecrate."

John the Carver looked to the west,
And saw how the sun went plunging down,
And all night long, while men were at rest,
His candle shone in the dusky town.

John the Carver looked to the east,
And saw how the sun sprang upward soon,
His hammer and chisel rang out all day,
Till the bells of the city rang down at noon,
And his hammer and chisel rang up the moon.

John the Carver toils in the Church,
The time draws nigh, and the night draws in,
The salt sweat runs over his face,
The salt tears run over his chin.

There are five little devils in the organ-loft,
They wriggle and laugh to see him cry;
He planes the wood and he trims it oft,
But ever those pillars stand awry.

And woe for the Bishop in his pomp and pride,
In his gloves and his mitre and broidered hood,
If the shrine still stand so wrenched aside
When he singeth High Mass at Holy Rood.

The Carver carves by the lanthorn's light,
As the last ray leaps from the distant hill,
When he was aware of a strong young man
That leaned in over the window-sill.

"How goeth thy work, good John?" said he;
"How goeth thy work here all alone?
They sing the Mass on to-morrow's morn,
And why is thy labour not yet done?"

"Who mayest thou be, my lusty lad,
That hast my name so pat to the tongue?"
"Oh, I am a man of strength and skill,
And I am come with a right good will
To finish thy work ere the matins-song."

John the Carver looked at his head,
John the Carver looked at his feet;
"If thou be the devil as I think," he said,
"Go, get thee back to thy burning seat.

" I never will trade with the devil of hell
To save my neck from the hempen cord,
And if thou be but a mortal man
'Tis but little wage that I can afford."

He crossed himself on the breast and brow:
" Thou seest I be no devil," quoth he;
" I will work for thee till the break of day,
And all for Sweet Saint Charity."

He set the chisel into his hand:
" Let see," quoth John, " how well ye can."
But all amazed must he stare and stand,
There was never a carver in wide England
Could handle his tools like that strange man.

John and the stranger toiled all night,
Till the loud bells rang to the matins-call,
And the five little devils took angry flight,
And under the rose-red, eastern light
The shrine stood seemly and straight and tall.

" What mighty master art thou," said John,
" That art so gracious to give me aid? "
" My name is God, but in years long gone
I was a carpenter by trade."

The story was followed by a pause such as falls upon a company of well-bred English persons when the name of God is mentioned in public. Mrs. Dane-Vereker had got no farther than a soft

preliminary sound, when Miss Pogson, careless of proverbial wisdom, rushed into the breach.

"How do you do it?" she cried; "I think it is so wonderful! I can't imagine how you ever think of the rhymes!"

Father Anthony's meekness was not proof against this assault. His eyes narrowed, and his whole appearance suggested that a snort was only repressed by the rigid habit of self-discipline. ("My dear Mr. Sheppard," his old Bishop had mildly said to him on one occasion, "the apostolic injunction is to suffer fools gladly—*gladly*, you know.") Peter Brown was however suddenly inspired to a remark which could offend nobody.

"I often wonder," he said, "why those old people were so jolly about the supernatural. They always were expecting to run up against the Virgin Mary, or—er—Christ, or somebody nice. But all the modern stories are creepy-crawly, and most of them are simply beastly. Chesterton says something about it somewhere."

"One might give a good guess at the reason," said the Priest, "but it will be better to ask Mr. Scott to give us a specimen of the other kind by beginning at once upon

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S TALE"

THE BEAST WITH FIVE FINGERS

WHEN I was a little boy I once went with my father to call on Adrian Borlsover. I played on the floor with a black spaniel while my father appealed for a subscription. Just before we left my father said, "Mr. Borlsover, may my son here shake hands with you? It will be a thing to look back upon with pride when he grows to be a man."

I came up to the bed on which the old man was lying and put my hand in his, awed by the still beauty of his face. He spoke to me kindly, and hoped that I should always try to please my father. Then he placed his right hand on my head and asked for a blessing to rest upon me. "Amen!" said my father, and I followed him out of the room, feeling as if I wanted to cry. But my father was in excellent spirits.

"That old gentleman, Jim," said he, "is the most wonderful man in the whole town. For ten years he has been quite blind."

"But I saw his eyes," I said. "They were ever so black and shiny; they weren't shut up like Nora's puppies. Can't he see at all?"

And so I learnt for the first time that a man might have eyes that looked dark and beautiful and shining without being able to see.

"Just like Mrs. Tomlinson has big ears," I said, "and can't hear at all except when Mr. Tomlinson shouts."

"Jim," said my father, "it's not right to talk about a lady's ears. Remember what Mr. Borlsover said about pleasing me and being a good boy."

That was the only time I saw Adrian Borlsover. I soon forgot about him and the hand which he laid in blessing on my head. But for a week I prayed that those dark tender eyes might see.

"His spaniel may have puppies," I said in my prayers, "and he will never be able to know how funny they look with their eyes all closed up. Please let old Mr. Borlsover see."

Adrian Borlsover, as my father had said, was a wonderful man. He came of an eccentric family. Borlsovers' sons, for some reason, always seemed to marry very ordinary women, which perhaps accounted for the fact that no Borlsover had been a genius, and only one Borlsover had been mad. But they were great champions of little causes, generous patrons of odd sciences, founders of querulous sects, trustworthy guides to the by-path meadows of erudition.

Adrian was an authority on the fertilisation of orchids. He had held at one time the family living at Borlsover Conyers, until a congenital weakness of the lungs obliged him to seek a less

rigorous climate in the sunny south coast watering-place where I had seen him. Occasionally he would relieve one or other of the local clergy. My father described him as a fine preacher, who gave long and inspiring sermons from what many men would have considered unprofitable texts. "An excellent proof," he would add, "of the truth of the doctrine of direct verbal inspiration."

Adrian Borlsover was exceedingly clever with his hands. His penmanship was exquisite. He illustrated all his scientific papers, made his own woodcuts, and carved the reredos that is at present the chief feature of interest in the church at Borlsover Conyers. He had an exceedingly clever knack in cutting silhouettes for young ladies and paper pigs and cows for little children, and made more than one complicated wind instrument of his own devising.

When he was fifty years old Adrian Borlsover lost his sight. In a wonderfully short time he had adapted himself to the new conditions of life. He quickly learned to read Braille. So marvellous indeed was his sense of touch that he was still able to maintain his interest in botany. The mere passing of his long supple fingers over a flower was sufficient means for its identification, though occasionally he would use his lips. I have found several letters of his among my father's correspondence. In no case was there anything to show that he was afflicted with blindness, and this in spite of the fact that he exercised undue economy in the spacing of lines. Towards the

close of his life the old man was credited with powers of touch that seemed almost uncanny: it has been said that he could tell at once the colour of a ribbon placed between his fingers. My father would neither confirm nor deny the story.

I

Adrian Borlsover was a bachelor. His elder brother George had married late in life, leaving one son, Eustace, who lived in the gloomy Georgian mansion at Borlsover Conyers, where he could work undisturbed in collecting material for his great book on heredity.

Like his uncle, he was a remarkable man. The Borlsovers had always been born naturalists, but Eustace possessed in a special degree the power of systematising his knowledge. He had received his university education in Germany, and then, after post-graduate work in Vienna and Naples, had travelled for four years in South America and the East, getting together a huge store of material for a new study into the processes of variation.

He lived alone at Borlsover Conyers with Saunders his secretary, a man who bore a somewhat dubious reputation in the district, but whose powers as a mathematician, combined with his business abilities, were invaluable to Eustace.

Uncle and nephew saw little of each other. The visits of Eustace were confined to a week in the summer or autumn: long weeks, that dragged almost as slowly as the bath-chair in which the old man

was drawn along the sunny sea front. In their way the two men were fond of each other, though their intimacy would doubtless have been greater had they shared the same religious views. Adrian held to the old-fashioned evangelical dogmas of his early manhood; his nephew for many years had been thinking of embracing Buddhism. Both men possessed, too, the reticence the Borlsovers had always shown, and which their enemies sometimes called hypocrisy. With Adrian it was a reticence as to the things he had left undone; but with Eustace it seemed that the curtain which he was so careful to leave undrawn hid something more than a half-empty chamber.

Two years before his death Adrian Borlsover developed, unknown to himself, the not uncommon power of automatic writing. Eustace made the discovery by accident. Adrian was sitting reading in bed, the forefinger of his left hand tracing the Braille characters, when his nephew noticed that a pencil the old man held in his right hand was moving slowly along the opposite page. He left his seat in the window and sat down beside the bed. The right hand continued to move, and now he could see plainly that they were letters and words which it was forming.

"Adrian Borlsover," wrote the hand, "Eustace Borlsover, George Borlsover, Francis Borlsover, Sigismund Borlsover, Adrian Borlsover, Eustace Borlsover, Saville Borlsover. B, for Borlsover. Honesty is the Best Policy. Beautiful Belinda Borlsover."

"What curious nonsense!" said Eustace to himself.

"King George the Third ascended the throne in 1760," wrote the hand. "Crowd, a noun of multitude; a collection of individuals—Adrian Borlsover, Eustace Borlsover."

"It seems to me," said his uncle, closing the book, "that you had much better make the most of the afternoon sunshine and take your walk now." "I think perhaps I will," Eustace answered as he picked up the volume. "I won't go far, and when I come back I can read to you those articles in *Nature* about which we were speaking."

He went along the promenade, but stopped at the first shelter, and seating himself in the corner best protected from the wind, he examined the book at leisure. Nearly every page was scored with a meaningless jungle of pencil marks: rows of capital letters, short words, long words, complete sentences, copy-book tags. The whole thing, in fact, had the appearance of a copy-book, and on a more careful scrutiny Eustace thought that there was ample evidence to show that the handwriting at the beginning of the book, good though it was, was not nearly so good as the handwriting at the end.

He left his uncle at the end of October, with a promise to return early in December. It seemed to him quite clear that the old man's power of automatic writing was developing rapidly, and for the first time he looked forward to a visit that combined duty with interest.

But on his return he was at first disappointed. His uncle, he thought, looked older. He was

listless too, preferring others to read to him and dictating nearly all his letters. Not until the day before he left had Eustace an opportunity of observing Adrian Borlsover's new-found faculty.

The old man, propped up in bed with pillows, had sunk into a light sleep. His two hands lay on the coverlet, his left hand tightly clasping his right. Eustace took an empty manuscript book and placed a pencil within reach of the fingers of the right hand. They snatched at it eagerly; then dropped the pencil to unloose the left hand from its restraining grasp.

"Perhaps to prevent interference I had better hold that hand," said Eustace to himself, as he watched the pencil. Almost immediately it began to write.

"Blundering Borlsovers, unnecessarily unnatural, extraordinarily eccentric, culpably curious."

"Who are you?" asked Eustace, in a low voice.

"Never you mind," wrote the hand of Adrian.

"Is it my uncle who is writing?"

"Oh, my prophetic soul, mine uncle."

"Is it any one I know?"

"Silly Eustace, you'll see me very soon."

"When shall I see you?"

"When poor old Adrian's dead."

"Where shall I see you?"

"Where shall you not?"

Instead of speaking his next question, Borlsover wrote it. "What is the time?"

The fingers dropped the pencil and moved three or four times across the paper. Then, picking up the pencil, they wrote:

"Ten minutes before four. Put your book away, Eustace. Adrian mustn't find us working at this sort of thing. He doesn't know what to make of it, and I won't have poor old Adrian disturbed. *Au revoir.*"

Adrian Borlsover awoke with a start.

"I've been dreaming again," he said; "such queer dreams of leaguered cities and forgotten towns. You were mixed up in this one, Eustace, though I can't remember how. Eustace, I want to warn you. Don't walk in doubtful paths. Choose your friends well. Your poor grandfather——"

A fit of coughing put an end to what he was saying, but Eustace saw that the hand was still writing. He managed unnoticed to draw the book away. "I'll light the gas," he said, "and ring for tea." On the other side of the bed curtain he saw the last sentences that had been written.

"It's too late, Adrian," he read. "We're friends already; aren't we, Eustace Borlsover?"

On the following day Eustace Borlsover left. He thought his uncle looked ill when he said good-bye, and the old man spoke despondently of the failure his life had been.

"Nonsense, uncle!" said his nephew. "You have got over your difficulties in a way not one in a hundred thousand would have done. Every one marvels at your splendid perseverance in teaching your hand to take the place of your lost sight. To me it's been a revelation of the possibilities of education."

"Education," said his uncle dreamily, as if the word had started a new train of thought, "educa-

tion is good so long as you know to whom and for what purpose you give it. But with the lower orders of men, the base and more sordid spirits, I have grave doubts as to its results. Well, good-bye, Eustace, I may not see you again. You are a true Borlsover, with all the Borlsover faults. Marry, Eustace. Marry some good, sensible girl. And if by any chance I don't see you again, my will is at my solicitor's. I've not left you any legacy, because I know you're well provided for, but I thought you might like to have my books. Oh, and there's just one other thing. You know, before the end people often lose control over themselves and make absurd requests. Don't pay any attention to them, Eustace. Good-bye!" and he held out his hand. Eustace took it. It remained in his a fraction of a second longer than he had expected, and gripped him with a virility that was surprising. There was, too, in its touch a subtle sense of intimacy.

"Why, uncle!" he said, "I shall see you alive and well for many long years to come."

Two months later Adrian Borlsover died.

II

Eustace Borlsover was in Naples at the time. He read the obituary notice in the *Morning Post* on the day announced for the funeral.

"Poor old fellow!" he said. "I wonder where I shall find room for all his books."

The question occurred to him again with greater force when three days later he found himself

standing in the library at Borlsover Conyers, a huge room built for use, and not for beauty, in the year of Waterloo by a Borlsover who was an ardent admirer of the great Napoleon. It was arranged on the plan of many college libraries, with tall, projecting bookcases forming deep recesses of dusty silence, fit graves for the old hates of forgotten controversy, the dead passions of forgotten lives. At the end of the room, behind the bust of some unknown eighteenth-century divine, an ugly iron corkscrew stair led to a shelf-lined gallery. Nearly every shelf was full.

"I must talk to Saunders about it," said Eustace. "I suppose that it will be necessary to have the billiard-room fitted up with bookcases."

The two men met for the first time after many weeks in the dining-room that evening.

"Hullo!" said Eustace, standing before the fire with his hands in his pockets. "How goes the world, Saunders? Why these dress togs?" He himself was wearing an old shooting-jacket. He did not believe in mourning, as he had told his uncle on his last visit; and though he usually went in for quiet-coloured ties, he wore this evening one of an ugly red, in order to shock Morton the butler, and to make them thrash out the whole question of mourning for themselves in the servants' hall. Eustace was a true Borlsover. "The world," said Saunders, "goes the same as usual, confoundedly slow. The dress togs are accounted for by an invitation from Captain Lockwood to bridge."

"How are you getting there?"

" I've told your coachman to drive me in your carriage. Any objection ? "

" Oh, dear me, no ! We've had all things in common for far too many years for me to raise objections at this hour of the day."

" You'll find your correspondence in the library," went on Saunders. " Most of it I've seen to. There are a few private letters I haven't opened. There's also a box with a rat, or something, inside it that came by the evening post. Very likely it's the six-toed beast Terry was sending us to cross with the four-toed albino. I didn't look, because I didn't want to mess up my things, but I should gather from the way it's jumping about that it's pretty hungry."

" Oh, I'll see to it," said Eustace, " while you and the Captain earn an honest penny."

Dinner over and Saunders gone, Eustace went into the library. Though the fire had been lit the room was by no means cheerful.

" We'll have all the lights on at any rate," he said, as he turned the switches. " And, Morton," he added, when the butler brought the coffee, " get me a screwdriver or something to undo this box. Whatever the animal is, he's kicking up the deuce of a row. What is it ? Why are you dawdling ? "

" If you please, sir, when the postman brought it he told me that they'd bored the holes in the lid at the post-office. There were no breathin' holes in the lid, sir, and they didn't want the animal to die. That is all, sir."

" It's culpably careless of the man, whoever he

was," said Eustace, as he removed the screws, "packing an animal like this in a wooden box with no means of getting air. Confound it all! I meant to ask Morton to bring me a cage to put it in. Now I suppose I shall have to get one myself."

He placed a heavy book on the lid from which the screws had been removed, and went into the billiard-room. As he came back into the library with an empty cage in his hand he heard the sound of something falling, and then of something scuttling along the floor.

"Bother it! The beast's got out. How in the world am I to find it again in this library!"

To search for it did indeed seem hopeless. He tried to follow the sound of the scuttling in one of the recesses where the animal seemed to be running behind the books in the shelves, but it was impossible to locate it. Eustace resolved to go on quietly reading. Very likely the animal might gain confidence and show itself. Saunders seemed to have dealt in his usual methodical manner with most of the correspondence. There were still the private letters.

What was that? Two sharp clicks and the lights in the hideous candelabra that hung from the ceiling suddenly went out.

"I wonder if something has gone wrong with the fuse," said Eustace, as he went to the switches by the door. Then he stopped. There was a noise at the other end of the room, as if something was crawling up the iron corkscrew stair. "If it's gone into the gallery," he said, "well and

good." He hastily turned on the lights, crossed the room, and climbed up the stair. But he could see nothing. His grandfather had placed a little gate at the top of the stair, so that children could run and romp in the gallery without fear of accident. This Eustace closed, and having considerably narrowed the circle of his search, returned to his desk by the fire.

How gloomy the library was! There was no sense of intimacy about the room. The few busts that an eighteenth-century Borlsover had brought back from the grand tour, might have been in keeping in the old library. Here they seemed out of place. They made the room feel cold, in spite of the heavy red damask curtains and great gilt cornices.

With a crash two heavy books fell from the gallery to the floor; then, as Borlsover looked, another and yet another.

"Very well; you'll starve for this, my beauty!" he said. "We'll do some little experiments on the metabolism of rats deprived of water. Go on! Chuck them down! I think I've got the upper hand." He turned once again to his correspondence. The letter was from the family solicitor. It spoke of his uncle's death and of the valuable collection of books that had been left to him in the will.

"There was one request," he read, "which certainly came as a surprise to me. As you know, Mr. Adrian Borlsover had left instructions that his body was to be buried in as simple a manner as possible at Eastbourne. He expressed a desire

that there should be neither wreaths nor flowers of any kind, and hoped that his friends and relatives would not consider it necessary to wear mourning. The day before his death we received a letter cancelling these instructions. He wished his body to be embalmed (he gave us the address of the man we were to employ—Pennifer, Ludgate Hill), with orders that his right hand was to be sent to you, stating that it was at your special request. The other arrangements as to the funeral remained unaltered."

"Good Lord!" said Eustace; "what in the world was the old boy driving at? And what in the name of all that's holy is that?"

Some one was in the gallery. Some one had pulled the cord attached to one of the blinds, and it had rolled up with a snap. Some one must be in the gallery, for a second blind did the same. Some one must be walking round the gallery, for one after the other the blinds sprang up, letting in the moonlight.

"I haven't got to the bottom of this yet," said Eustace, "but I will do before the night is very much older," and he hurried up the corkscrew stair. He had just got to the top when the lights went out a second time, and he heard again the scuttling along the floor. Quickly he stole on tiptoe in the dim moonshine in the direction of the noise, feeling as he went for one of the switches. His fingers touched the metal knob at last. He turned on the electric light.

About ten yards in front of him, crawling along the floor, was a man's hand. Eustace stared at it

in utter astonishment. It was moving quickly, in the manner of a geometer caterpillar, the fingers humped up one moment, flattened out the next; the thumb appeared to give a crab-like motion to the whole. While he was looking, too surprised to stir, the hand disappeared round the corner. Eustace ran forward. He no longer saw it, but he could hear it as it squeezed its way behind the books on one of the shelves. A heavy volume had been displaced. There was a gap in the row of books where it had got in. In his fear lest it should escape him again, he seized the first book that came to his hand and plugged it into the hole. Then, emptying two shelves of their contents, he took the wooden boards and propped them up in front to make his barrier doubly sure.

"I wish Saunders was back," he said; "one can't tackle this sort of thing alone." It was after eleven, and there seemed little likelihood of Saunders returning before twelve. He did not dare to leave the shelf unwatched, even to run downstairs to ring the bell. Morton the butler often used to come round about eleven to see that the windows were fastened, but he might not come. Eustace was thoroughly unstrung. At last he heard steps down below.

"Morton!" he shouted; "Morton!"

"Sir?"

"Has Mr. Saunders got back yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Well, bring me some brandy, and hurry up about it. I'm up here in the gallery, you duffer."

"Thanks," said Eustace, as he emptied the

glass. "Don't go to bed yet, Morton. There are a lot of books that have fallen down by accident; bring them up and put them back in their shelves."

Morton had never seen Borlsover in so talkative a mood as on that night. "Here," said Eustace, when the books had been put back and dusted, "you might hold up these boards for me, Morton. That beast in the box got out, and I've been chasing it all over the place."

"I think I can hear it chawing at the books, sir. They're not valuable, I hope? I think that's the carriage, sir; I'll go and call Mr. Saunders."

It seemed to Eustace that he was away for five minutes, but it could hardly have been more than one when he returned with Saunders. "All right, Morton, you can go now. I'm up here, Saunders."

"What's all the row?" asked Saunders, as he lounged forward with his hands in his pockets. The luck had been with him all the evening. He was completely satisfied, both with himself and with Captain Lockwood's taste in wines. "What's the matter? You look to me to be in an absolute blue funk."

"That old devil of an uncle of mine," began Eustace—"oh, I can't explain it all. It's his hand that's been playing old Harry all the evening. But I've got it cornered behind these books. You've got to help me catch it."

"What's up with you, Eustace? What's the game?"

"It's no game, you silly idiot! If you don't

believe me take out one of those books and put your hand in and feel."

"All right," said Saunders; "but wait till I've rolled up my sleeve. The accumulated dust of centuries, eh?" He took off his coat, knelt down, and thrust his arm along the shelf.

"There's something there right enough," he said. "It's got a funny stumpy end to it, whatever it is, and nips like a crab. Ah, no, you don't!" He pulled his hand out in a flash. "Shove in a book quickly. Now it can't get out."

"What was it?" asked Eustace.

"It was something that wanted very much to get hold of me. I felt what seemed like a thumb and forefinger. Give me some brandy."

"How are we to get it out of there?"

"What about a landing net?"

"No good. It would be too smart for us. I tell you, Saunders, it can cover the ground far faster than I can walk. But I think I see how we can manage it. The two books at the end of the shelf are big ones that go right back against the wall. The others are very thin. I'll take out one at a time, and you slide the rest along until we have it squashed between the end two."

It certainly seemed to be the best plan. One by one, as they took out the books, the space behind grew smaller and smaller. There was something in it that was certainly very much alive. Once they caught sight of fingers pressing outward for a way of escape. At last they had it pressed between the two big books.

"There's muscle there, if there isn't flesh and

blood," said Saunders, as he held them together. "It seems to be a hand right enough, too. I suppose this is a sort of infectious hallucination. I've read about such cases before."

"Infectious fiddlesticks!" said Eustace, his face white with anger; "bring the thing downstairs. We'll get it back into the box."

It was not altogether easy, but they were successful at last. "Drive in the screws," said Eustace, "we won't run any risks. Put the box in this old desk of mine. There's nothing in it that I want. Here's the key. Thank goodness, there's nothing wrong with the lock."

"Quite a lively evening," said Saunders. "Now let's hear more about your uncle."

They sat up together until early morning. Saunders had no desire for sleep. Eustace was trying to explain and to forget: to conceal from himself a fear that he had never felt before—the fear of walking alone down the long corridor to his bedroom.

III

"Whatever it was," said Eustace to Saunders on the following morning, "I propose that we drop the subject. There's nothing to keep us here for the next ten days. We'll motor up to the Lakes and get some climbing."

"And see nobody all day, and sit bored to death with each other every night. Not for me, thanks. Why not run up to town? Run's the exact word in this case, isn't it? We're both in such a blessed

funk. Pull yourself together, Eustace, and let's have another look at the hand."

"As you like," said Eustace; "there's the key." They went into the library and opened the desk. The box was as they had left it on the previous night.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Eustace.

"I am waiting for you to volunteer to open the lid. However, since you seem to funk it, allow me. There doesn't seem to be the likelihood of any rumpus this morning, at all events." He opened the lid and picked out the hand.

"Cold?" asked Eustace.

"Tepid. A bit below blood-heat by the feel. Soft and supple too. If it's the embalming, it's a sort of embalming I've never seen before. Is it your uncle's hand?"

"Oh, yes, it's his all right," said Eustace. "I should know those long thin fingers anywhere. Put it back in the box, Saunders. Never mind about the screws. I'll lock the desk, so that there'll be no chance of its getting out. We'll compromise by motoring up to town for a week. If we get off soon after lunch we ought to be at Grantham or Stamford by night."

"Right," said Saunders; "and to-morrow——Oh, well, by to-morrow we shall have forgotten all about this beastly thing."

If when the morrow came they had not forgotten, it was certainly true that at the end of the week they were able to tell a very vivid ghost story at the little supper Eustace gave on Hallow E'en.

"You don't want us to believe that it's true, Mr. Borlsover? How perfectly awful!"

"I'll take my oath on it, and so would Saunders here; wouldn't you, old chap?"

"Any number of oaths," said Saunders. "It was a long thin hand, you know, and it gripped me just like that."

"Don't, Mr. Saunders! Don't! How perfectly horrid! Now tell us another one, do. Only a really creepy one, please!"

"Here's a pretty mess!" said Eustace on the following day as he threw a letter across the table to Saunders. "It's your affair, though. Mrs. Merrit, if I understand it, gives a month's notice."

"Oh, that's quite absurd on Mrs. Merrit's part," Saunders replied. "She doesn't know what she's talking about. Let's see what she says."

"DEAR SIR," he read, "this is to let you know that I must give you a month's notice as from Tuesday the 13th. For a long time I've felt the place too big for me, but when Jane Parfit and Emma Laidlaw go off with scarcely as much as an 'if you please,' after frightening the wits out of the other girls, so that they can't turn out a room by themselves or walk alone down the stairs for fear of treading on half-frozen toads or hearing it run along the passages at night, all I can say is that it's no place for me. So I must ask you, Mr. Borlsover, sir, to find a new housekeeper that has no objection to large and lonely houses, which some

people do say, not that I believe them for a minute, my poor mother always having been a Wesleyan, are haunted.

"Yours faithfully,

"ELIZABETH MERRIT.

"P.S.—I should be obliged if you would give my respects to Mr. Saunders. I hope that he won't run no risks with his cold."

"Saunders," said Eustace, "you've always had a wonderful way with you in dealing with servants. You mustn't let poor old Merrit go."

"Of course she shan't go," said Saunders. "She's probably only angling for a rise in salary. I'll write to her this morning."

"No; there's nothing like a personal interview. We've had enough of town. We'll go back to-morrow, and you must work your cold for all it's worth. Don't forget that it's got on to the chest, and will require weeks of feeding up and nursing."

"All right. I think I can manage Mrs. Merrit."

But Mrs. Merrit was more obstinate than he had thought. She was very sorry to hear of Mr. Saunders's cold, and how he lay awake all night in London coughing; very sorry indeed. She'd change his room for him gladly, and get the south room aired. And wouldn't he have a hot basin of bread and milk last thing at night? But she was afraid that she would have to leave at the end of the month.

"Try her with an increase of salary," was the advice of Eustace.

It was no use. Mrs. Merrit was obdurate, though she knew of a Mrs. Handyside who had been housekeeper to Lord Gargrave, who might be glad to come at the salary mentioned.

"What's the matter with the servants, Morton?" asked Eustace that evening when he brought the coffee into the library. "What's all this about Mrs. Merrit wanting to leave?"

"If you please, sir, I was going to mention it myself. I have a confession to make, sir. When I found your note asking me to open that desk and take out the box with the rat, I broke the lock as you told me, and was glad to do it, because I could hear the animal in the box making a great noise, and I thought it wanted food. So I took out the box, sir, and got a cage and was going to transfer it, when the animal got away."

"What in the world are you talking about? I never wrote any such note."

"Excuse me, sir, it was the note I picked up here on the floor on the day you and Mr. Saunders left. I have it in my pocket now."

It certainly seemed to be in Eustace's handwriting. It was written in pencil, and began somewhat abruptly.

"Get a hammer, Morton," he read, "or some other tool, and break open the lock in the old desk in the library. Take out the box that is inside. You need not do anything else. The lid is already open. Eustace Borlsover."

"And you opened the desk?"

"Yes, sir; and as I was getting the cage ready the animal hopped out."

"What animal?"

"The animal inside the box, sir."

"What did it look like?"

"Well, sir, I couldn't tell you," said Morton nervously; "my back was turned, and it was half way down the room when I looked up."

"What was its colour?" asked Saunders; "black?"

"Oh, no, sir, a greyish white. It crept along in a very funny way, sir. I don't think it had a tail."

"What did you do then?"

"I tried to catch it, but it was no use. So I set the rat-traps and kept the library shut. Then that girl Emma Laidlaw left the door open when she was cleaning, and I think it must have escaped."

"And you think it was the animal that's been frightening the maids?"

"Well, no, sir, not quite. They said it was—you'll excuse me, sir—a hand that they saw. Emma trod on it once at the bottom of the stairs. She thought then it was a half-frozen toad, only white. And then Parfit was washing up the dishes in the scullery. She wasn't thinking about anything in particular. It was close on dusk. She took her hands out of the water and was drying them absent-minded like on the roller towel, when she found that she was drying some one else's hand as well, only colder than hers."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Saunders.

"Exactly, sir; that's what I told her; but we couldn't get her to stop."

"You don't believe all this?" said Eustace, turning suddenly towards the butler.

"Me, sir? Oh, no, sir! I've not seen anything."

"Nor heard anything?"

"Well, sir, if you must know, the bells do ring at odd times, and there's nobody there when we go; and when we go round to draw the blinds of a night, as often as not somebody's been there before us. But as I says to Mrs Merrit, a young monkey might do wonderful things, and we all know that Mr. Borlsover has had some strange animals about the place."

"Very well, Morton, that will do."

"What do you make of it?" asked Saunders when they were alone. "I mean of the letter he said you wrote."

"Oh, that's simple enough," said Eustace. "See the paper it's written on? I stopped using that years ago, but there were a few odd sheets and envelopes left in the old desk. We never fastened up the lid of the box before locking it in. The hand got out, found a pencil, wrote this note, and shoved it through the crack on to the floor where Morton found it. That's plain as daylight."

"But the hand couldn't write?"

"Couldn't it? You've not seen it do the things I've seen," and he told Saunders more of what had happened at Eastbourne.

"Well," said Saunders, "in that case we have at least an explanation of the legacy. It was the hand which wrote unknown to your uncle that

letter to your solicitor, bequeathing itself to you. Your uncle had no more to do with that request than I. In fact, it would seem that he had some idea of this automatic writing, and feared it."

"Then if it's not my uncle, what is it?"

"I suppose some people might say that a disembodied spirit had got your uncle to educate and prepare a little body for it. Now it's got into that little body and is off on its own."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"We'll keep our eyes open," said Saunders, "and try to catch it. If we can't do that, we shall have to wait till the bally clockwork runs down. After all, if it's flesh and blood, it can't live for ever."

For two days nothing happened. Then Saunders saw it sliding down the banister in the hall. He was taken unawares, and lost a full second before he started in pursuit, only to find that the thing had escaped him. Three days later, Eustace, writing alone in the library at night, saw it sitting on an open book at the other end of the room. The fingers crept over the page, feeling the print as if it were reading; but before he had time to get up from his seat, it had taken the alarm and was pulling itself up the curtains. Eustace watched it grimly as it hung on to the cornice with three fingers, flicking thumb and forefinger at him in an expression of scornful derision.

"I know what I'll do," he said. "If I only get it into the open I'll set the dogs on to it."

He spoke to Saunders of the suggestion.

"It's a jolly good idea," he said; "only we won't

wait till we find it out of doors. We'll get the dogs. There are the two terriers and the under-keeper's Irish mongrel that's on to rats like a flash. Your spaniel has not got spirit enough for this sort of game." They brought the dogs into the house, and the keeper's Irish mongrel chewed up the slippers, and the terriers tripped up Morton as he waited at table ; but all three were welcome. Even false security is better than no security at all.

For a fortnight nothing happened. Then the hand was caught, not by the dogs, but by Mrs. Merrit's grey parrot. The bird was in the habit of periodically removing the pins that kept its seed and water tins in place, and of escaping through the holes in the side of the cage. When once at liberty Peter would show no inclination to return, and would often be about the house for days. Now, after six consecutive weeks of captivity, Peter had again discovered a new means of unloosing his bolts and was at large, exploring the tapestried forests of the curtains and singing songs in praise of liberty from cornice and picture rail.

" It's no use your trying to catch him," said Eustace to Mrs. Merrit, as she came into the study one afternoon towards dusk with a step-ladder. " You'd much better leave Peter alone. Starve him into surrender, Mrs Merrit, and don't leave bananas and seed about for him to peck at when he fancies he's hungry. You're far too soft-hearted."

" Well, sir, I see he's right out of reach now on that picture rail, so if you wouldn't mind closing

the door, sir, when you leave the room, I'll bring his cage in to-night and put some meat inside it. He's that fond of meat, though it does make him pull out his feathers to suck the quills. They *do* say that if you cook——"

"Never mind, Mrs. Merrit," said Eustace, who was busy writing. "That will do; I'll keep an eye on the bird."

There was silence in the room, unbroken but for the continuous whisper of his pen.

"Scratch poor Peter," said the bird. "Scratch poor old Peter!"

"Be quiet, you beastly bird!"

"Poor old Peter! Scratch poor Peter, do."

"I'm more likely to wring your neck if I get hold of you." He looked up at the picture rail, and there was the hand holding on to a hook with three fingers, and slowly scratching the head of the parrot with the fourth. Eustace ran to the bell and pressed it hard; then across to the window, which he closed with a bang. Frightened by the noise the parrot shook its wings preparatory to flight, and as it did so the fingers of the hand got hold of it by the throat. There was a shrill scream from Peter as he fluttered across the room, wheeling round in circles that ever descended, borne down under the weight that clung to him. The bird dropped at last quite suddenly, and Eustace saw fingers and feathers rolled into an inextricable mass on the floor. The struggle abruptly ceased as finger and thumb squeezed the neck; the bird's eyes rolled up to show the whites, and there was a faint, half-choked gurgle.

But before the fingers had time to loose their hold, Eustace had them in his own.

"Send Mr. Saunders here at once," he said to the maid who came in answer to the bell. "Tell him I want him immediately."

Then he went with the hand to the fire. There was a ragged gash across the back where the bird's beak had torn it, but no blood oozed from the wound. He noticed with disgust that the nails had grown long and discoloured.

"I'll burn the beastly thing," he said. But he could not burn it. He tried to throw it into the flames, but his own hands, as if restrained by some old primitive feeling, would not let him. And so Saunders found him, pale and irresolute, with the hand still clasped tightly in his fingers.

"I've got it at last," he said in a tone of triumph.

"Good; let's have a look at it."

"Not when it's loose. Get me some nails and a hammer and a board of some sort."

"Can you hold it all right?"

"Yes, the thing's quite limp; tired out with throttling poor old Peter, I should say."

"And now," said Saunders when he returned with the things, "what are we going to do?"

"Drive a nail through it first, so that it can't get away; then we can take our time over examining it."

"Do it yourself," said Saunders. "I don't mind helping you with guinea-pigs occasionally when there's something to be learned; partly because I don't fear a guinea-pig's revenge. This thing's different."

" All right, you miserable skunk. I won't forget the way you've stood by me."

He took up a nail, and before Saunders had realised what he was doing had driven it through the hand, deep into the board.

" Oh, my aunt," he giggled hysterically, " look at it now," for the hand was writhing in agonised contortions, squirming and wriggling upon the nail like a worm upon the hook.

" Well," said Saunders, " you've done it now. I'll leave you to examine it."

" Don't go, in heaven's name. Cover it up, man, cover it up ! Shove a cloth over it ! Here ! " and he pulled off the antimacassar from the back of a chair and wrapped the board in it. " Now get the keys from my pocket and open the safe. Chuck the other things out. Oh, Lord, it's getting itself into frightful knots ! and open it quick ! " He threw the thing in and banged the door.

" We'll keep it there till it dies," he said. " May I burn in hell if I ever open the door of that safe again."

. . . . .

Mrs. Merrit departed at the end of the month. Her successor certainly was more successful in the management of the servants. Early in her rule she declared that she would stand no nonsense, and gossip soon withered and died. Eustace Borlsover went back to his old way of life. Old habits crept over and covered his new experience. He was, if anything, less morose, and showed a greater inclination to take his natural part in country society.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he marries one of these days," said Saunders. "Well, I'm in no hurry for such an event. I know Eustace far too well for the future Mrs. Borlsover to like me. It will be the same old story again: a long friendship slowly made—marriage—and a long friendship quickly forgotten."

IV

But Eustace Borlsover did not follow the advice of his uncle and marry. He was too fond of old slippers and tobacco. The cooking, too, under Mrs. Handyside's management was excellent, and she seemed, too, to have a heaven-sent faculty in knowing when to stop dusting.

Little by little the old life resumed its old power. Then came the burglary. The men, it was said, broke into the house by way of the conservatory. It was really little more than an attempt, for they only succeeded in carrying away a few pieces of plate from the pantry. The safe in the study was certainly found open and empty, but, as Mr. Borlsover informed the police inspector, he had kept nothing of value in it during the last six months.

"Then you're lucky in getting off so easily, sir," the man replied. "By the way they have gone about their business, I should say they were experienced cracksmen. They must have caught the alarm when they were just beginning their evening's work."

"Yes," said Eustace, "I suppose I am lucky."

" I've no doubt," said the inspector, " that we shall be able to trace the men. I've said that they must have been old hands at the game. The way they got in and opened the safe shows that. But there's one little thing that puzzles me. One of them was careless enough not to wear gloves, and I'm bothered if I know what he was trying to do. I've traced his finger-marks on the new varnish on the window sashes in every one of the downstairs rooms. They are very distinctive ones too."

" Right hand or left, or both ? " asked Eustace.

" Oh, right every time. That's the funny thing. He must have been a foolhardy fellow, and I rather think it was him that wrote that." He took out a slip of paper from his pocket. " That's what he wrote, sir. ' I' ve got out, Eustace Borlsover, but I'll be back before long.' Some gaol bird just escaped, I suppose. It will make it all the easier for us to trace him. Do you know the writing, sir ? "

" No," said Eustace; " it's not the writing of any one I know."

" I'm not going to stay here any longer," said Eustace to Saunders at luncheon. " I've got on far better during the last six months than ever I expected, but I'm not going to run the risk of seeing that thing again. I shall go up to town this afternoon. Get Morton to put my things together, and join me with the car at Brighton on the day after to-morrow. And bring the proofs of those two papers with you. We'll run over them together."

"How long are you going to be away?"

"I can't say for certain, but be prepared to stay for some time. We've stuck to work pretty closely through the summer, and I for one need a holiday. I'll engage the rooms at Brighton. You'll find it best to break the journey at Hitchin. I'll wire to you there at the Crown to tell you the Brighton address."

The house he chose at Brighton was in a terrace. He had been there before. It was kept by his old college gyp, a man of discreet silence, who was admirably partnered by an excellent cook. The rooms were on the first floor. The two bedrooms were at the back, and opened out of each other. "Saunders can have the smaller one, though it is the only one with a fireplace," he said. "I'll stick to the larger of the two, since it's got a bathroom adjoining. I wonder what time he'll arrive with the car."

Saunders came about seven, cold and cross and dirty. "We'll light the fire in the dining-room," said Eustace, "and get Prince to unpack some of the things while we are at dinner. What were the roads like?"

"Rotten; swimming with mud, and a beastly cold wind against us all day. And this is July. Dear old England!"

"Yes," said Eustace, "I think we might do worse than leave dear old England for a few months."

They turned in soon after twelve.

"You oughtn't to feel cold, Saunders," said Eustace, "when you can afford to sport a great

cat-skin lined coat like this. You do yourself very well, all things considered. Look at those gloves, for instance. Who could possibly feel cold when wearing them ? "

" They are far too clumsy though for driving. Try them on and see," and he tossed them through the door on to Eustace's bed, and went on with his unpacking. A minute later he heard a shrill cry of terror. " Oh, Lord," he heard, " it's in the glove ! Quick, Saunders, quick ! " Then came a smacking thud. Eustace had thrown it from him. " I've chucked it into the bathroom," he gasped, " it's hit the wall and fallen into the bath. Come now if you want to help." Saunders, with a lighted candle in his hand, looked over the edge of the bath. There it was, old and maimed, dumb and blind, with a ragged hole in the middle, crawling, staggering, trying to creep up the slippery sides, only to fall back helpless.

" Stay there," said Saunders. " I'll empty a collar box or something, and we'll jam it in. It can't get out while I'm away."

" Yes, it can," shouted Eustace. " It's getting out now. It's climbing up the plug chain. No, you brute, you filthy brute, you don't ! Come back, Saunders, it's getting away from me. I can't hold it ; it's all slippery. Curse its claw ! Shut the window, you idiot ! The top too, as well as the bottom. You utter idiot ! It's got out ! " There was the sound of something dropping on to the hard flagstones below, and Eustace fell back fainting.

. . . . .

For a fortnight he was ill.

"I don't know what to make of it," the doctor said to Saunders. "I can only suppose that Mr. Borlsover has suffered some great emotional shock. You had better let me send some one to help you nurse him. And by all means indulge that whim of his never to be left alone in the dark. I would keep a light burning all night if I were you. But he *must* have more fresh air. It's perfectly absurd this hatred of open windows."

Eustace, however, would have no one with him but Saunders. "I don't want the other men," he said. "They'd smuggle it in somehow. I know they would."

"Don't worry about it, old chap. This sort of thing can't go on indefinitely. You know I saw it this time as well as you. It wasn't half so active. It won't go on living much longer, especially after that fall. I heard it hit the flags myself. As soon as you're a bit stronger we'll leave this place; not bag and baggage, but with only the clothes on our backs, so that it won't be able to hide anywhere. We'll escape it that way. We won't give any address, and we won't have any parcels sent after us. Cheer up, Eustace! You'll be well enough to leave in a day or two. The doctor says I can take you out in a chair to-morrow."

"What have I done?" asked Eustace. "Why does it come after me? I'm no worse than other men. I'm no worse than you, Saunders; you know I'm not. It was you who were at the bottom of that dirty business in San Diego, and that was fifteen years ago."

"It's not that, of course," said Saunders. "We are in the twentieth century, and even the parsons have dropped the idea of your old sins finding you out. Before you caught the hand in the library it was filled with pure malevolence—to you and all mankind. After you spiked it through with that nail it naturally forgot about other people, and concentrated its attention on you. It was shut up in that safe, you know, for nearly six months. That gives plenty of time for thinking of revenge."

Eustace Borlsover would not leave his room, but he thought that there might be something in Saunders's suggestion to leave Brighton without notice. He began rapidly to regain his strength.

"We'll go on the first of September," he said.

* * * * *

The evening of August 31st was oppressively warm. Though at midday the windows had been wide open, they had been shut an hour or so before dusk. Mrs. Prince had long since ceased to wonder at the strange habits of the gentlemen on the first floor. Soon after their arrival she had been told to take down the heavy window curtains in the two bedrooms, and day by day the rooms had seemed to grow more bare. Nothing was left lying about.

"Mr. Borlsover doesn't like to have any place where dirt can collect," Saunders had said as an excuse. "He likes to see into all the corners of the room."

"Couldn't I open the window just a little?".

he said to Eustace that evening. "We're simply roasting in here, you know."

"No, leave well alone. We're not a couple of boarding-school misses fresh from a course of hygiene lectures. Get the chessboard out."

They sat down and played. At ten o'clock Mrs. Prince came to the door with a note. "I am sorry I didn't bring it before," she said, "but it was left in the letter-box."

"Open it, Saunders, and see if it wants answering."

It was very brief. There was neither address nor signature.

"Will eleven o'clock to-night be suitable for our last appointment?"

"Who is it from?" asked Borlsover.

"It was meant for me," said Saunders. "There's no answer, Mrs. Prince," and he put the paper into his pocket. "A dunning letter from a tailor; I suppose he must have got wind of our leaving."

It was a clever lie, and Eustace asked no more questions. They went on with their game.

On the landing outside Saunders could hear the grandfather's clock whispering the seconds, blurting out the quarter-hours.

"Check!" said Eustace. The clock struck eleven. At the same time there was a gentle knocking on the door; it seemed to come from the bottom panel.

"Who's there?" asked Eustace.

There was no answer.

"Mrs. Prince, is that you?"

"She is up above," said Saunders; "I can hear her walking about the room."

"Then lock the door; bolt it too. Your move, Saunders."

While Saunders sat with his eyes on the chessboard, Eustace walked over to the window and examined the fastenings. He did the same in Saunders's room and the bathroom. There were no doors between the three rooms, or he would have shut and locked them too.

"Now, Saunders," he said, "don't stay all night over your move. I've had time to smoke one cigarette already. It's bad to keep an invalid waiting. There's only one possible thing for you to do. What was that?"

"The ivy blowing against the window. There, it's your move now, Eustace."

"It wasn't the ivy, you idiot. It was some one tapping at the window," and he pulled up the blind. On the outer side of the window, clinging to the sash, was the hand.

"What is it that it's holding?"

"It's a pocket-knife. It's going to try to open the window by pushing back the fastener with the blade."

"Well, let it try," said Eustace. "Those fasteners screw down; they can't be opened that way. Anyhow, we'll close the shutters. It's your move, Saunders. I've played."

But Saunders found it impossible to fix his attention on the game. He could not understand

Eustace, who seemed all at once to have lost his fear. "What do you say to some wine?" he asked. "You seem to be taking things coolly, but I don't mind confessing that I'm in a blessed funk."

"You've no need to be. There's nothing supernatural about that hand, Saunders. I mean it seems to be governed by the laws of time and space. It's not the sort of thing that vanishes into thin air or slides through oaken doors. And since that's so, I defy it to get in here. We'll leave the place in the morning. I for one have bottomed the depths of fear. Fill your glass, man! The windows are all shuttered, the door is locked and bolted. Pledge me my uncle Adrian! Drink, man! What are you waiting for?"

Saunders was standing with his glass half raised. "It can get in," he said hoarsely; "it can get in! We've forgotten. There's the fireplace in my bedroom. It will come down the chimney."

"Quick!" said Eustace, as he rushed into the other room; "we haven't a minute to lose. What can we do? Light the fire, Saunders. Give me a match, quick!"

"They must be all in the other room. I'll get them."

"Hurry, man, for goodness' sake! Look in the bookcase! Look in the bathroom! Here, come and stand here; I'll look."

"Be quick!" shouted Saunders. "I can hear something!"

"Then plug a sheet from your bed up the chimney. No, here's a match." He had found one at last that had slipped into a crack in the floor.

"Is the fire laid? Good, but it may not burn. I know—the oil from that old reading-lamp and this cotton-wool. Now the match, quick! Pull the sheet away, you fool! We don't want it now."

There was a great roar from the grate as the flames shot up. Saunders had been a fraction of a second too late with the sheet. The oil had fallen on to it. It, too, was burning.

"The whole place will be on fire!" cried Eustace, as he tried to beat out the flames with a blanket. "It's no good! I can't manage it. You must open the door, Saunders, and get help."

Saunders ran to the door and fumbled with the bolts. The key was stiff in the lock.

"Hurry!" shouted Eustace; "the whole place is ablaze!"

The key turned in the lock at last. For half a second Saunders stopped to look back. Afterwards he could never be quite sure as to what he had seen, but at the time he thought that something black and charred was creeping slowly, very slowly, from the mass of flames towards Eustace Borlsover. For a moment he thought of returning to his friend, but the noise and the smell of the burning sent him running down the passage crying, "Fire! Fire!" He rushed to the telephone to summon help, and then back to the bathroom—he should have

thought of that before—for water. As he burst open the bedroom door there came a scream of terror which ended suddenly, and then the sound of a heavy fall.

This is the story which I heard on successive Saturday evenings from the senior mathematical master at a second-rate suburban school. For Saunders has had to earn a living in a way which other men might reckon less congenial than his old manner of life. I had mentioned by chance the name of Adrian Borlsover, and wondered at the time why he changed the conversation with such unusual abruptness. A week later, Saunders began to tell me something of his own history—sordid enough, though shielded with a reserve I could well understand, for it had to cover not only his failings but those of a dead friend. Of the final tragedy he was at first especially loath to speak, and it was only gradually that I was able to piece together the narrative of the preceding pages. Saunders was reluctant to draw any conclusions. At one time he thought that the fingered beast had been animated by the spirit of Sigismund Borlsover, a sinister eighteenth-century ancestor, who, according to legend, built and worshipped in the ugly pagan temple that overlooked the lake. At another time Saunders believed the spirit to belong to a man whom Eustace had once employed as a laboratory assistant, "a black-haired spiteful little brute," he said, "who died cursing his doctor because the fellow couldn't help

him to live to settle some paltry score with Borlsover."

From the point of view of direct contemporary evidence, Saunders's story is practically uncorroborated. All the letters mentioned in the narrative were destroyed, with the exception of the last note which Eustace received, or rather which he would have received had not Saunders intercepted it. That I have seen myself. The handwriting was thin and shaky, the handwriting of an old man. I remember the Greek " e " was used in " appointment." A little thing that amused me at the time was that Saunders seemed to keep the note pressed between the pages of his Bible.

I had seen Adrian Borlsover once. Saunders, I learnt to know well. It was by chance, however, and not by design, that I met a third person of the story, Morton the butler. Saunders and I were walking in the Zoological Gardens one Sunday afternoon, when he called my attention to an old man who was standing before the door of the reptile house.

" Why, Morton ! " he said, clapping him on the back. " How is the world treating you ? "

" Poorly, Mr. Saunders," said the old fellow, though his face lighted up at the greeting. " The winters drag terribly nowadays. There don't seem no summers or springs."

" You haven't found what you were looking for, I suppose ? "

" No, sir, not yet; but I shall do some day. I always told them that Mr. Borlsover kept some queer animals."

" And what is he looking for ? " I asked, when we had parted from him.

" A beast with five fingers," said Saunders. " This afternoon, since he has been in the reptile house, I suppose it will be a reptile with a hand. Next week it will be a monkey with practically no body. The poor old chap is a born materialist.

" It's a queer coincidence, by the way, that you should have known Adrian Borlsover and that you should have received a blessing at his hand. Has it brought you any luck ? "

" No," I answered slowly, as I looked back over a life of inconspicuous failure, " I don't think it has. It was his right hand, you know."

" A first-rate tale," commented Dr. Pennock, when Henry Scott fell silent. " I am particularly interested in the nervous reactions. There is surely more than a foundation of truth to the fictional creepiness ? "

The Psychic Researcher smiled deprecatingly.

" We are telling stories . . ." he murmured.

The Woman Doctor twinkled in rapid response.

" Apologies, my dear colleague. For the moment I forgot we were on holiday."

" For my part," flourished the Courier, " I thanked the good God for daylight, and I look with trepidation to my dreams. But without doubt Miss Pogson will dispel the shades of terror."

Partly by instinct, partly by acuteness, the Schoolmarm had fixed on a subject and manner for her tale designed to test searchingly the

remoter humours of the party. She was sharp enough to realise that appreciation of the vulgar comes both before and after appreciation of the witty, the subtle, or the delicate. One comes back to it, so to speak. That in her case the appreciation was of the earlier variety is immaterial; she did not know it. The importance of her choice of story lay in its strange conquest of the two extremes of her audience and their reconciliation—not only to herself, but to each other. When appealed to by the Courier to restore the company's failing sense of normality, she pulled herself jerkily together, and then, so to speak, redistributed herself into what was meant to be an attitude of languid ease.

THE SCHOOLMARM'S TALE

"In my profession," she began with shrill angularity, "there are constant misunderstandings, ceaseless gossip. The position of the instructor of youth is one exposed to slander and misrepresentation. Here is a story founded on my own experience, and cast in a form to which I have given some study—*le vers libre*." And she bobbed humorously to the Courier.

A NEAR THING

OH, yes! A near thing,—
Very near,
And altogether dreadful!
So uninvited,
Unexpected,
Indeed, quite devastating!
I only tell the tale,
The harrowing tale,
That all may know the truth,
And lay to heart the saddening fact,
That innocence, however blameless,
Can be traduced with sorry ease,
When slanderers, glib-tongued and base,
So will it.

. . . . .

Miss Brainybird, M.A.,
Schoolmarm compleat,
Was forty-five, and virtuous as ever,
When calumny began
To blacken and defame her,
Most cruelly, most wickedly,
And most unjustly too.
And all because she wished to save

Money for the school,
Which she'd adored and served,
As its devoted Head,
For ten full years.
Never had she thought of self,
Never grudged her time or thought,
For that dear school!
And now to be accused of . . .
No! she could not say it,
Could not even think it!
Her second-in-command,
Unfailing echo,
Ready sympathiser,
Said all she could to soothe her.
No one, she declared,
Could possibly believe it,
Such a libel!
So criminal!
So unsubstantiated!
"They do! They do!" exclaimed Miss B.,
Almost sobbing.
"The girls are leaving;
Nearly all the girls are leaving;
I've had their notices to-day."
Miss White turned pale,
Deathly pale,
And clutched her furrowed brow.
"It can't be true," she gasped;
"The horrid, wicked, lying tale
Has turned your brain.
The girls all leaving——"
"There are the letters," said Miss B.,
"Of their ungrateful, hateful mothers,"

And pointed to a pile,
Stack-like in size.
" What shall we do ? " wailed poor Miss White.
Then they wailed together
For some long time.
Presently Miss White came out,
Still pale, but looking resolute,
Ready, indeed, for anything.
Her hands were clenched,
Her teeth were clenched,
Her hair was bristling oddly.
She almost growled.

. . . . . .

The next and last day of the term,
The girls and staff alike awaited,
With tense and fevered interest,
The customary harangue
Of Her, their Head,
Sometime, revered and idolised,
But now, their mothers said,
No longer good and reputable,
Unless she had gone raving mad.
In either case, she was not suited
To educate and influence
Their little innocents !
She cleared her throat,
Did she, Miss Brainybird,
And then began as follows :
" Benefactors, small and great,
Have we to thank this term.
Among them, let us not forget,
Kind Mr. Smith,
Who lent a sleeping-suit

For you to draw, you know,
At your examination.
A choice of test, I thought,
Most ill-advised.
But, as you know, we are not here
Responsible for the selection.
And through the kindness of a father
Of three of our brightest little scholars,
We were able it to borrow,
Instead of purchasing,
Economising for the school,
Our dear, dear school.
No expense thus was incurred,
But the trifling one
Of having the aforesaid suit
Washed and ironed at the laundry.
Mine?
Of course I paid the little sum
Myself, and gladly,
Please tell your parents, children,
All of you.
Now don't forget!
I would like them all to know.
Misunderstandings do arise
So easily.
And Mr. Smith has been so kind."
. . . . .
All was well;
Miss Brainybird was saved;
The school grew and multiplied.

Against a background of polite, if somewhat awkward, amusement, two phenomena stood out

in bold relief. Mrs. Dane-Vereker had giggles; Mr. Buck was stifling laughter with a bandana handkerchief as brightly coloured as his face.

"Oh, dear!" gasped the Lady of Fashion. "Miss Pogson, you are too perfect; an oasis in a waste of subtlety. I suppose it is elementary of me, but that is just the kind of thing that tickles me to death. Like mothers-in-law and red noses . . ."

And she wiped her eyes with a handkerchief of amethyst silk. By "elementary" she meant "cultured enough to be able to descend without loss of caste," but Miss Pogson, although the music-hall analogy struck a spark of suspicion from her nervous egoism, decided to take the tribute as genuine, and grinned complacently.

Mr. Buck emerged from his bandana and beamed at the Schoolmarm with watery eyes.

"Neat!" he whispered hoarsely. "Damn neat! Didn't guess it myself till the very end. You ought to be on the stage, y' know. 'Pon my word, you ought."

Another theatrical reference! Miss Pogson glowed. Some day perhaps. . . . She saw the sea of faces, powdered with the glare of the footlights; heard the ripple of laughter swelling to tumultuous applause. She would have to assume another name. Drusilla Crackanthorpe, perhaps; or Marcelle Vansittart, *diseuse*. *Diseuse* was good.

But alas for castles in the air! The Bureaucrat, undisguisedly bored (the Foreign Office is never very elemental), was shuffling his feet and

tapping a cigarette on the back of his hand, while his gaze wandered wearily over the sea.

"Dr. Pennock comes next," he said incisively, but in a low voice, as though thinking aloud.

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S TALE

Dr. Pennock, as may be imagined, was not the woman to simulate hesitation.

"You will not blame me if my story has a more than professional flavour," she began, without more than a moment's pause.

MOTHER-LOVE

UNTIL about two years ago I lived solitary in a moor village. When I came first from the hospital to help my father, distrust and fear met me on every hand. For three years I could do little for him but dispense medicines and visit the convalescent; and even they seemed uneasily to look for an ill-consequence to the visits of a woman mad enough to set herself up for a doctor. Some of them refused to have me in the house. Old Sampson Pickersgill gave way to a fit of bitter wrath. "Nay, doctor," he cried, "and I'm to be turned over to a lass to be a laughing-stock for t' village, I'd as lief die." He turned his face to the wall and prepared to die incontinent.

I might have gone back to the town, where the dislike of women doctors was already dying—except among the male medical students. A double thread held me in the desolate village. My father was an obstinate old man, and I—am his daughter. I had, moreover, to reconcile him to that daughter. He had wished for a son to take his place.

Suspicion and fear vanished slowly in the

course of years. Before my father died "Doctor Mary" had been accepted. I should have been happy.

I am happy. I am nevertheless defeated. To the hard obstinacy that is my heritage the years of disappointment have added another legacy. I am constantly surprised at the depth of the bitterness that cuts me off alike from friendship as from content. I do not forget the years. Behind the kindly welcome I see the mask of mockery and dislike, until at times I doubt whether the kindliness be not the mask and hatred the reality.

During my idle years I spent much time writing. I wrote a deal of intolerant nonsense round the vices and failings of my neighbours. My father read patiently through some hundred pages. At the end he said:

"Have you ever caught yourself saying, 'Good! I'll put that in a book.' You do say it, you know. . . . Do you remember what happened to Procrustes?"

I came later to sharing his distaste for the modern novelist's custom of stretching friends and enemies on the bed of a pithecoid psychology. At the time I was hurt, and showed my resentment.

Later, he brought me a meagre pile of papers.

"All that is left of my scrawlings," he said, with a faintly mocking smile. "I learned the hard lesson of tolerance late, but, I think, in time. These are records of my lessons."

The story of Arthur Charlton is as he wrote

it. There is nothing in it of mine but the title, and I cannot be sure whether that title is not a flicker of the intolerance against which he tilted all his life.

The fault may have lain farther back than in the silly will of a silly old man. I believe that it did, but John Charlton's will, and the marriage that followed it, are far enough back for my tale. It was a will that would be certainly set aside to-day, and could have been set aside then had Mary Charlton been a wiser or a less religious woman. I was a young man at the time, and I thought her either obstinate or cowed by the harshness that had shadowed her whole twenty years of life. She was neither, as I came later to acknowledge.

John Charlton was her grandfather. Her father broke away from the parental dominance, married a girl in the neighbouring village, and took her with him to Australia. I believe she died when Mary was born; certainly she did not live long after that, and her husband died within the third year. He had found work; they had even a sufficiency of money; but it was with him as if all vitality had been drained out of him in the long years when his nature was silently opposing itself to his father's. Even his final rebellion was accomplished by stealth. There was no defiant scene, no challenge. He left the house for a visit to a friend, and never returned. I remember that I sneered at the tale, and was immediately ashamed of the sneer. John Charlton was an

extraordinary old man: he would tolerate nothing short of the most unresisting submission from his family and his dependants. His wife was a healthy young woman, rather assertive, and full of life. He broke her so that she was a spiritless wreck for years before she died, in fact, yet no one ever saw or heard him treat her with anything but chill civility. His son never openly defied him, but underneath his deference his will fought unceasingly against absorption in the stronger one, and in the end he, too, broke and died.

Mary Charlton would be two years old when she came to the Stone House. She was twenty when her grandfather died, and during the whole of that time he never gave her one word of welcome or affection. The ladies at the Castle would have made much of her, but he refused to allow Mary to visit them, and had the door of the Stone House shut in their faces. He dismissed an old servant whom he had seen caressing and playing with the forlorn child, so that Mary came to accept secrecy and stealth as a natural condition of her furtive life.

I do not know whether she was relieved when he died. Maybe she had not time to realise her freedom before she was faced with a new captivity. The whole of his money and the estate were to be hers on condition that she married his nephew, Richard Charlton, a hard-riding, hard-drinking squireen whom the old man had seen once and heartily disliked. If she refused the conditions, the whole was to be distributed among various

charities. John Charlton had never given a penny-piece to a beggar in his life.

There was vast indignation in the village when the old man's malice was known. My lady came herself from the Castle to advise Mary to fight the will. But the girl shook her head, and looked at my lady out of dry eyes. To her scrupulous mind there was no alternative but marriage or beggary. The old man must assuredly have known that when he made the will. He must have known, too, that she could not possibly refuse the conditions. Her life in his house had brought her to the state of mind of a prisoner released after all hope and desire of freedom is dead—mortally afraid of freedom, asking only the security of the cell.

She married Richard Charlton. On the night of the wedding he got amazingly drunk in "The Generous Briton," and swore that his bride's face made his gorge rise. "I'd ha' been sick—sick, I'm telling ye—but the money steadied me stomach, so it did."

They left him to sleep it off in the grounds of the Stone House, and in the morning, unusually ashamed of himself, he apologised to the white-faced girl before two or three of the servants. Neither voice nor face betrayed any emotion as she answered. No one, in fact, ever knew whether she cared or not when the house was full of his boon companions, and the drinking went on all night until half the company were sick and the other half under the table. She never spoke of it to him, and he never again apologised. He

was not an unkind husband, and he did not interfere with her management of the estate. That she managed very well, and as time went on her gestures and the inflections of her voice came to resemble the dead man's so nearly that the servants were startled—even horrified.

They had been married five years when their son was born. It was a desperately hard childbirth, and I had ado to pull her round. Her husband worked himself up into a fearful state, and the danger past, went and drank himself stupid at the inn. She never asked for him, and when, four days later, he came and stood awkwardly by her bedside, she did not open her eyes. He poked shyly at his son's small red face, and chuckled suddenly. "We'll make a man o' you," he said; "by gad, we will." Her eyes opened at that, and she looked at him, so that he fell silent, and in a few moments got himself out of the room, pulling at his coat fronts and talking at random.

The boy had a Christian name, of course—Arthur, it was—but I never heard him called anything but young Charlton, and his father was old Charlton henceforth. As he grew up a transient likeness to his father disappeared, and he became more and more unlike either of his parents. He was healthy enough, well built and handsome, but grave and sensitive to an abnormal degree. He was passionately fond of his mother, and she seemed to draw her whole life from his. If anything had happened to him I verily believe she would not have lived a

day after his death. To old Charlton he was a pricking disappointment. "Ain't a milksop," he said to me, "but *is* a fool—a damn fool. Seen him stand and look at the sun setting for ten minutes—give you my word." His father's clumsy attempts at tenderness seemed indeed to repel the boy; he avoided them and avoided his father, and old Charlton grieved in a fumbling sort of way, and drank the harder.

The boy was in his second year at Cambridge when Mary Charlton died. She had ailed for a long time, and woke early one morning to an agony that left her speechless and exhausted. I sent for her son, though I doubted she would be gone before he could reach her, and she was. All morning she lay, propped among her pillows, with her eyes on the bend of the drive. About eleven o'clock she seemed to realise that death would cheat her, and she beckoned me to come nearer. She had refused to see her husband, and in the silence I could hear him blubbering loudly in the next room.

"Doctor," she said, as I bent over her, "promise me to help my boy. He will need help. I fear I have done him wrong." Her face was distorted.

"Oh, my dear," I said, "you never wronged him, or dreamed of wrong."

Her lips smiled a little. "I see strange things now," she said.

A little later I spoke to her of her husband, but she turned her face away.

"I have always disliked him," she said.

Another ten minutes, and the spirit was gone out of her, and old Charlton was howling at her side.

"A fine woman she was, doctor—a fine woman. I thought no end of her, and at times I've actually thought she couldn't abide me."

I got him out of the room before her son came, and flung himself down beside the bed in a speechless anguish.

At the reading of her will I found that she wished me to have the big portrait of herself, painted when the boy was five years old. The bequest rather surprised me. I took and hung the thing in my study, and the dark eyes looked coldly down at me as I worked. They drew my attention so insistently that at last I moved my chair from its usual place, and if I had not been ashamed of the impulse I would have taken the portrait down and stowed it away. Later I found myself struggling with a sense of guilt beneath that unmoving gaze. Did Mary Charlton perhaps know that all was not well with her boy?

For six months after his mother's death young Charlton never went beyond the grounds of the house. His father sat night after night in "The Generous Briton" and drank himself into a state of slobbering grief. He would rest his head on his arms and cry for an hour or more. "The best of women. All I could, I did for her, but she wasn't happy, she wasn't. Ought to have had a cleverer johnnie than me. She couldn't have had one that loved her better, but she looked down on me, she did, and she had the right——"

When he got too bad they turned him out without ceremony, the little respect they had shown him for his wife's sake gone with her.

I spoke to the boy about returning to Cambridge, but to my amazement he refused to go back. He listened to all I said, and shook his head. When I tried to prick him into planning for the future his obstinacy disappeared in apathy. His mind was a sheath from which all purpose or desire for action had been drawn out. I could do nothing for him.

The change came without warning. He appeared unexpectedly at the first meet of the season, and thereafter rode regularly and rode hard. He drank with his father at night until his father could drink no more, and then sat laughing at him across the disordered table—laughing and laughing. Once he caught up the silver candlesticks and brought them down on the table with a terrific crash on each side of the maudlin wretch. "Drink," he said; "drink, you old devil; stand on your legs and drink." He ran round the table and dragged his father to his feet, and so stood supporting him while the shaking old hand splashed the wine down chin and shirt-front and on to the table-cloth among the grease from the candles.

In the last years of Mary Charlton's life there had been talk of a match between Arthur Charlton and the younger of the girls at the Castle. The girl was shyly interested in the grave youth, taken, most like, by his difference from the boisterous young squires of her other acquaintance. Arthur

himself, though not ardent, was at least pleasantly quiescent. It fell to me now to convey to him my lady's abhorrence of his present conduct, and repudiation of all tentative arrangements for the alliance. The boy laughed in my face.

"Marriage!" he said; "good God, doctor, don't you think I've seen enough of marriage? Tell her to take the pink-faced damsel to another market, and welcome."

It was less than six months after this that old Charlton died. I certified heart failure, but no one was deceived, and very few were found to grieve for him. Certainly his son did not. He followed the coffin from the church to the grave-side, and there, when the undertaker plucked at his sleeve to bid him look for the last time into the grave, he turned his back and thrust his hands into the pockets of his mourning suit. "No, thanks," he said; "I've seen enough." He spoke very distinctly, and the words scandalised the hearers, and almost created a genuine pity for old Charlton.

The day after the funeral the young man left for London. A year later he came back, bringing with him a London bride. He had given no notice of his return, and up at the Stone House everything was in confusion—rooms hastily prepared, sheets airing, joints and pastries cooking in a wild haste. My lady sent from the Castle to beg the young couple to dine and sleep there, but the invitation was refused, by Charlton's orders.

None the less, he was courteous, and apparently even anxious to be agreeable, when my lady made

her first call. His wife was very young, with quantities of russet hair and a small, rather elfish face. She spoke with a soft London drawl that contrasted sharply with my lady's downright habit of speech, but she was unaffected and full of interest in country ways and country folk. Arthur's manner held my attention. He moved restlessly about the room, talking with a superficial wittiness that annoyed my lady and was quite unusual in him. His wife seemed to like it. Her grey eyes followed his movements with an affectionate delight. Once he came and leaned on the back of her chair. She turned round to smile up at him, and laid her hand on his arm. The look that passed over his face startled me. Disgust, and something like fear, followed each other and were gone in an instant as he freed himself gently and moved away. His little wife noticed nothing, and talked on with a light-hearted assurance of happiness that I found almost painful. I left with the Castle party, and my lady turned to me as we walked down the drive.

"Arthur all right again, eh?" she said.

"Why, yes," I answered, and hesitated, puzzled to account to myself for the hesitation.

It became speedily apparent that Arthur was not all right. For a time his London wife's gaiety was unshadowed. She learned to ride, she danced at the county balls, and gave little parties that the young folk liked. She sang to them in her high pretty voice, and they played games of blind-man's-buff and hide-and-seek all over the

rambling old house. But after a while her gaiety became almost fierce. She would look across a ballroom to where her husband leaned against the wall, and laugh without reason or merriment. The little parties became less frequent, and the servants at the Stone House told queer tales. Charlton was drinking again, and once at least the sound of a blow was followed by a low sobbing that went on at intervals through the night. And for the next few evenings the little wife wore a long-sleeved dinner-gown that covered her arms and came below her wrists.

Something was very wrong, and indignation rose in the village against Charlton. One day little boys threw stones at him as he rode through, and he turned on them a look so black that they fled as fast as their trembling legs would let them.

The wrong went from bad to worse. Mrs. Charlton was seen less and less frequently at the country-house parties and dances, but it was said that she found other ways of amusing herself. Of these tales I took no stock, until one day in the early spring. I had got me as assistant a young man from one of the London hospitals. He was a pleasant-spoken youth with a fair, attractive face. I did not notice that he visited the Stone House more than was necessary to the care of Jane Cook's scalded arm, until the evening he walked into my study with his coat hanging in rags on him, and a swollen blackened face. I got the story in fragments. Wounded pride was clearly the dominant passion at the moment,

though he swore to pity and affection for the unhappy wife. Yet even she had misused him.

"She let me kiss her and all that, you know," he said. "Let me go a long way. I give you my word I never forced myself on her. I thought she was willing for anything. And then to-night, when I would have gone a bit farther, if she didn't turn on me and cry out! And he came in through the window." Satisfaction struggled with his sense of injury. "I gave him as much as I got, and a bit more," he said.

Of course I sent him back to town, but after that I made excuses to go up to the Stone House fairly often, though the wife was very cool and the husband ignored me. Mary Charlton's eyes pleaded with me for her son, and there was nothing I could do.

A few weeks after my young Don Juan had gone back to town the Charltons had a house-party. At least, Arthur Charlton did: none of his wife's friends were asked. The panelled walls of the dining-room at the Stone House saw the father's orgies played through again by the son. Glasses were broken, the old butler had his head cut open by a plate, guests rolled off their chairs, and mine host held his sides and laughed until his pale face was crimson. That was bad enough, but worse followed. The Stone House motor went one day to meet the London train, and came back with a cargo of light goods. Six fair ladies, packed close in the brougham, poked their pretty faces and absurd hats through the windows as the car ran through the village.

Arthur and his party were gathered on the steps of the house, and received them gladly. After dinner that night Charlton threw oranges and apples at the lamps till all were smashed, and the servants fled from the uproar in the darkened room.

All this time people marvelled that Mrs. Charlton did not leave her husband. It was known that her sister had travelled from London and begged her with tears to come away, but the young wife shook her head, and spent the days shut in her room or walking about the moors. I was of those who marvelled, and it was some weeks before the reason was clear to me. And before then I had been the witness of a curious scene.

Among the guests of that infernal house-party was another Charlton, a distant cousin of mine host. He was the next heir to the estate should Arthur die childless. I do not know what he thought of the orgies: he sat them out, but he was sober when Arthur staggered off to bed. Village malice suggested that he was watching for the son to die as the father had done. Whatever the reason, he stayed on.

On the third night of his visit, some days before the arrival of Phryne and her companions, he was sitting making great play with his glass, but drinking nothing, as was his habit. The door behind him opened noiselessly, and in the mirror on the opposite wall he caught a glimpse of a white face and two eyes blazing beneath a mass of russet hair. He turned sharply in his

chair, but the door was already closing. The next morning he waited patiently in the hall until a slight figure in grey had swung out of sight down the drive. Then he followed.

Less than a fortnight after, I was sitting at the end of my little orchard, half asleep over the agglutinative phrases of a famous German physiologist. It was warm and still, and the humming of flies among the dying may-trees was all the sound I heard. I do not know when I first became aware that some one was crying quietly just in my ear, and then it was some moments before I gathered my wits sufficiently to understand. I must own—alas for vanity!—that my orchard is not twelve feet square, and has three trees in it. Between it and my garden runs a narrow lane to the moors, with high uncut hedges that almost meet above. The sound of low weeping came from the lane, and as I hesitated a man spoke quickly:

"My dear, my dear, don't do that. Anne, I love you. I will take you away, Anne, my darling."

The stammered answer was in Mrs. Charlton's unmistakable drawl.

"Are you sure you care, Roger? Are you sure you're not just sorry?"

By this time, thoroughly alarmed, I crept across to the far side of my apple-patch, and tried to think the matter out. But before I could make up my mind to walk boldly through the little gate and across the lane into my garden, the two had moved on, and as I crept out I saw them

dimly in the shadows at the far end of the lane, locked in each other's arms.

Anne Charlton told me the outlines of the tale some weeks later, when she was sitting crying in my study beneath the mother's merciless glare. At first she had shrunk from the cousin, and then, slowly, he became in her sight the faithful knight, enduring for her sake the horrors of Arthur Charlton's orgies, drinking with the husband until suspicion was dulled, then creeping away to walk under the stars with the wife, to kiss her pale lips, and crush her slight body in his arms.

I do not know if he was ever man enough to walk right off with her, but whether he were or not, she soon persuaded him that it would be madness to risk scandal and divorce when by waiting——. They never told each other what end they looked for, and it was not long before Roger grew tired of waiting, and pressed for an earnest of their future happiness. But Anne held him away. She was very bitter and very unhappy, but she never quite lost her head. The thought of scandal and loss of caste filled her with horror. She wanted to be free, to lead a decent wholesome life, to call at the Castle, and give her little parties; but she wanted it to be all in order, and with no hint of irregularity.

Between them they evolved a plan: it was not a very good plan, and the outcome of it all was Anne in tears on the slippery sofa in my study. She came to me one morning and told me with hesitation that her husband's manner had become

very strange. He had thrown things at her, and yesterday he had come into her room and watched her as she brushed her hair. He held her neck between his hands, and said it was too pretty a neck to be twisted. And then he had laughed like a madman.

As Anne uttered the last word, she looked sharply at me, and lowered her voice.

"Doctor," she said, "you don't think he's mad, do you?"

Poor Anne! Her husband was no more mad than I am, and she knew it. She had not even the courage of her villainy, and a very little was enough to confuse her. And at last she broke down altogether, and poured out the whole unpleasing little tale.

After this it was clear to me that some one should make an attempt to get at Arthur. He was not more than twenty-six, and he looked forty. He was wicked, no doubt, but he was also wretchedly unhappy. I had loved the boy, and I blamed myself for not making the effort sooner. I walked up to the Stone House, and half way up the drive I saw him through the trees, sitting on a fallen trunk. I turned aside and spoke to him. He did not answer my greeting, but when I seated myself beside him he showed no annoyance. Indeed, after a while, he broke in upon my remarks with a laugh that was almost boyish.

"Doctor," he said, "you're a wretched dissembler. Out with it now. Lecture me and be done with it. Tell me that I'm ruining my

health, wasting my substance, and ill treating my wife. My wife!" The bitterness was back in his voice as he finished.

I turned round upon him. "Arthur," I said, "your mother was a good woman, and if she could see you now she would wish you'd died when you were born."

His face was terrible, but a moment later he put out a groping hand.

"I'd give my head to cut the last few years out of my life."

I had no words ready, and he went on.

"Anne! I thought I loved Anne before I married her. I hate her. I've grown to loathe her. I could kill her. I've been on the point of sending her away many times for fear I should kill her."

I tried to understand him.

"How long is it that you have felt like that towards her?"

I was thinking of my young doctor, but I was hopelessly at fault. The change in Arthur had begun long before then. He knew that himself.

"I can't tell you," he said slowly. "I think I began to dislike her the day I married her." He got suddenly to his feet. "Women," he said, and choked. "I hate all women." He turned and hurried away, walking with great strides through the trees.

Late that night I sat puzzling over the words and the state of mind that they suggested. I thought until I was too weary to think of anything but my bed. And as I carried my candle

past the portrait of Mary Charlton I could have imagined a triumphant smile on the thin lips.

The crash came a month later, and it was not the crash that all had been expecting. Charlton went up to town one day, and three days later his wife received a letter posted down the river at Northfleet, with the brief news that he was ruined and had left England. It turned out to be quite true. He had not only mortgaged the estate and spent money like water, but he had got involved in a matter of some salted mines, and more than bankruptcy awaited him if he were caught. His wife laughed as she read the letter. She sent away Roger Charlton and wired for her father. He was a rich man: a very rich man. She would not return home with him, and, to please her, he not only cleared off the mortgage, but settled on her an income more than enough to keep up the estate. He even settled the mine business. I think that she enjoyed her position as deserted wife and head of one of the finest houses in the county. However that might be, there she stayed, and after a fitting interval gave again her little parties and received very charmingly the sympathy of the Castle. I know that she refused to allow the cousin to return to the village, and I know also that she loved him to the utmost of her capacity, and her thin face grew thinner. In time, charity ascribed Arthur Charlton's wickedness to the financial worry that had hung over him. Folk said his mind was unhinged. Only my lady whispered sharply, after one of these kindly whitewashings,

" All nonsense, eh, doctor ? He was going wrong long before the money business could have started. *We* know that."

He had been gone nearly a year when Anne Charlton brought me a letter. It was very short, an awkward sympathy mingling with the writer's evident annoyance. Arthur Charlton was dead. The captain of the ship on which he had left England wrote to tell her so. He had died in a street accident in Vera Cruz. He owed the writer a matter of five pounds for wine bought on the ship, and twenty pounds borrowed from the mate and second mate and repaid by the captain.

Anne Charlton wished me to write and make sure that her husband was really dead.

" I will have nothing to do with it," she said, her mouth twisting in distaste.

I agreed to write, and as she went away, malice and curiosity got the better of me, and I asked her whether she wished to send by me the money for the dead man's debts.

She turned on me.

" I pay no debts of his," she said. " Probably the man is lying. And in any case, he has no claim on me."

" You are a rich woman, Mrs. Charlton," I ventured.

The pretty voice was very sharp.

" I am not a fool, doctor."

After she had gone I re-read the letter. I was convinced of the writer's honesty, and when I answered it I enclosed the amount of Arthur Charlton's debt. If it had been more I could

not have paid it, but as it was so small I did it gladly. I told the man that I was a doctor and an old friend of the dead man, and so doubly interested in his case. I hinted gently that all was not well with him when he left England, and begged for all the particulars possible. The reply was seven weeks coming, and when it came it was a bulky document, written with great care, and transparently honest. It was posted in Buenos Ayres, and had been drawn up on the voyage out.

As I read it I conceived something very like affection for the writer. I saw the little cabin of the tramp steamer, and the huge brown hand moving slowly across sheet after sheet of paper in an earnest effort to be as accurate and informative as possible. His success was greater than he could have hoped. The tragedy of Arthur Charlton's life grew clearer as I read. The lines might be blurred, but the whole shaped itself before my eyes, distinct enough. Much of what the patient hand had written helped not at all, but a sentence here, and a paragraph there, flung a light into the darkness and lit up far more than the old captain guessed at.

"DOCTOR GREGORY PENNOCK,

"SIR,

"The man, Arthur Charlton, came on board my ship at Northfleet late in the afternoon of October 14th of last year. We were not due to sail for three days, and I was surprised that he should come aboard so soon. We do not

usually carry passengers, and his berth was the best of the three next the cabin. It is very small, but he stayed in it all day, and after dark walked up and down the deck past the officers' berths. We knew later that he was wanted for a business of some mines. I thought at the time that something was wrong, but it was not my affair, and he had paid his passage to New Orleans. He was a quiet gentleman, and we got on very well until we were in the mouth of the Plate, and the pamparo came. He made a great trouble when we battened him down in the cabin, but it had to be done. In bad weather all passengers should be battened under."

Here the writer filled two sheets with careful details of the storm. It appears to have lasted nine days, and during that time the ship lay often on her side, and the captain himself gave all up for lost. "On the fifth day," he wrote, "seeing no hope, I thought of the plum cake that my wife put on board for Christmas Day. I knew she would grieve if it was not eaten, and it did not seem to me right to waste it, so I had it out, and by the eighth day had finished it."

The storm abated, but the worthy man expresses no regret for the cake. He went down to release the passenger, who had been battened down for nine days and nights, with no food except what the steward managed now and then to get to him.

"He did not look the same man, not having shaved during that time, and was half crazed with fear and sickness. He was shouting like a drunkard,

and I had him to my own cabin by the chart-house. He was delirious for three days. I doubt that I cannot now remember all his ravings, which would have interested you, being a medical man. He talked much of his mother, whom he thought to be unhappy. Certain remarks he made often, such as the following: 'Why did you marry him, mother, if you disliked him so?' And 'Mother, you didn't hate me *after* I was born, did you?' Once he took my arm and spoke so quietly that for a moment I considered him to be sane. 'I hope you are not married, my good man,' he said. 'Marriage is a loathsome thing.' Many times he cried out, 'Unclean, unclean,' which words occur in the Bible, though I never saw him read that Book. At times he thought himself to be fastened in the cabin, and cried out that he would die like a rat, and screamed with fear, and hammered on the sides of the bunk. . . .

"While we were at the Plate he was too ill to go ashore, and the same at Santos and Rio, but at Colon he did go, and he did not return. I sent to search for him, and the mate said that he had borrowed money from him before the storm, and for my part he had not paid for the wine I supplied him. I wrote it down a bad debt, but at Vera Cruz there was a letter came for the mate to say that he had given money to me to pay all his debts. I had not thought before that he was that sort of fellow. . . ."

The return voyage was made, the captain

had his holiday at home, and the following autumn went out again. In Vera Cruz he heard an unexpected piece of news. The plague had been there. Doctors and nurses had not been able to cope with more than half the stricken. Many, indeed, had fled. When things were at their worst, Arthur Charlton emerged from the shadows where he had starved and struggled since his flight from the ship. He offered himself to the doctors, and with unwearied devotion toiled through burning days and sleepless nights, nursing the sick, watching the dead, comforting the living. When the plague was over he found himself a hero. A subscription was got up for him, and he was asked to receive a purse of gold and a testimonial. An hour before the ceremony he was knocked down and killed by a car. The only papers in his possession referred to the captain of a tramp steamer, discovered to be in Vera Cruz again. Men sought the captain out, and he undertook to find out and inform any relatives the dead man might have had in England. This to the best of his ability he had done.

With that he ended his letter,

"Your obedient servant,

"WILLIAM CAMPBELL."

I turned in my chair and shook the papers at that watching woman on the wall. Even as I made it I was ashamed of the gesture. God help the poor creature! She was not to blame because her loathing of that wicked marriage, her outraged timidity and self-hatred had turned

and rent her unborn son. As I sat and thought it surprised me, not that Arthur was so mad and wild, but that he was so sane, seeing he had that in his mind that might have cracked any man's reason. True, he did not know it for what it was, the fear and dislike that wrecked his life, and went near to wrecking the frail little cockle-shell he had grappled to him. Had I had only an inkling of the truth I might have helped him. But no one was at hand—no one could be at hand—to save him in that hour when the hidden horror rose out of the depths of his consciousness and struck at the springs of his life. I grieved for him in vain.

Anne Charlton went into retirement for six weeks, and at the end of that time married Roger in the village church. I believe they are happy after their fashion. I dare say that Arthur and his mother are not unhappy, but I have taken Mary Charlton from my study wall and stored her in the loft.

"Mother-Love" was clearly one of those stories about which the layman should be cautious in criticism. The circle of listeners emitted appreciative sounds in various keys, and hoped that Henry Scott would give them a lead. But he was a man of self-effacement and good breeding, and, while promising himself a detailed discussion with Dr. Pennock on some later occasion of the Freudian bases of her tale, contented himself for the moment with a graceful gesture of thanks. Then he rose to knock out his pipe on the rail.

The Courier looked at his watch.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the magic hour of tea is upon us. Shall we go below?"

All rose with alacrity and hastened toward the companion. Half way up the stairs, his head bowed over a book, was the Professor, mounting slowly. The company, realising his absorption, drew back and formed a circle round an open space at the head of the companion. The Professor emerged, still reading. Perhaps something in the busy silence of the watching party jarred his attention. He raised his head and looked mistily at the assembly.

"Gentlemen," he began, "this morning I wish to continue the discussion on which last Friday we embarked, of the philological significance——"

Henry Scott took him by the arm and shook him gently.

"Recollect yourself, my dear Smith. This is not Gamaliel."

The Professor regarded him vaguely. Then a shade of actuality crept into his eyes. He closed his book and waved it in gentle apology.

"I——" he began.

"You are coming to have some tea," interrupted Henry Scott. And they stood aside to allow the ladies to pass.

It was a solid, sit-down meal, and spoons were soon clinking in the cups.

"I am sorrier than I can say that this unfortunate accident should have occurred," said the

Courier. "I know that some of our party, at least, are fretting for the sights of Europe."

"Not I, for one," said Father Anthony. "If you only knew how amazing this peace and quiet is to a fagged-out mortal like myself. Fancy not being able to rush on to the next thing, even if one felt one ought to."

"I don't mind peace and quiet," said the Bureaucrat, "provided we aren't stuck here for six weeks. I am not of the leisured class (with a grimace at Peter), and I have to get back to work some day."

"And I," chorussed the Woman Doctor and the Schoolmarm.

The latter was genuinely distressed at the thought that her plunge into life should thus be threatened with suspension on the very brink of the deep end.

"It will be dreadful," she cried plaintively, "if we lose much time!"

The Professor was here observed to be shaking his head relentlessly.

"What's your opinion, Professor?" asked Peter Brown. "Do you not agree with Miss Pogson?"

THE PROFESSOR'S TALE

THE PALMARY EXAMPLE

NO, said the Professor, swallowing a mouthful of buttered bun; no, I cannot concur. For my part I envisage this delay, not merely with equanimity, but actually with complacence. If, indeed, the term of our travels were strictly defined and our days spent motionless, or practically motionless, in this narrow place of the sea were to be subtracted from the total length of our excursion—if, that is, our journey were limited in respect of time instead of being destined to continue until we have completed a certain programme (poor Mr. Turpin was too grateful for this contentment to point out the Professor's misconception), then I might regret the enforced contemplation of a watery waste. As it is, I cannot but feel that I am getting, in a beautiful phrase coined by the daily press, getting my money's worth, which I conceive to mean that I am receiving more than I have paid for. And as my income is modest, this feeling is not without its relish.

You cannot conceive, madam, he continued, gazing at the Lady of Fashion, who returned his gaze without quailing, how many calls there are

on a Professor's pocket. I myself have annually to subscribe, for instance—and he paused to review mentally all the demands on the pocket of the learned—to the Cabman's Shelter in Broad Street.

He shook his head with a delicate melancholy and proceeded: Without in any degree wishing to vilipend the management of our expedition, I am bound to admit that in my opinion, if the weather reports of any competent meteorological authority had been intelligently consulted, that would have obviated a delay, which, however pleasing to myself personally, appears to dissatisfy the gross of the party. How dissimilar in similar circumstances—and a dangerously reminiscent note crept into his voice as he drifted farther and farther to sea on his own eloquence—how dissimilar would have been the management of a German tour. No detail would have escaped the notice of one of that chalkenterous people.

I remember once, when I was a young man and at the University of Bonn, I wished to visit the church of the Benedictine Monastery of Maria Laach. After some correspondence I received permission to pay my visit on a specified date, and on that date I set out in the company of a Serbian acquaintance, the memory of whose name the lapse of years has swallowed up, but to whom I propose to refer as Smith. We alighted from the train at the station, if I am not in error, of Niedermendig, and, as I walked off the platform I presented for inspection my return ticket to

Bonn. The subordinate official in his sentry-box grunted, probably to denote satisfaction, but made no other sign. Smith, who was behind me, presented his ticket in turn, and his the man seized and punched a small hole in its corner. As we left the station I asked Smith the meaning of this differentiation between us, but he confessed an ignorance equal to my own.

Three hours later, having seen what we came to see, and having in addition enjoyed an excellent tea, for the Germans are without rivals in the manufacture of plain cakes, we again approached the station of Niedermendig—if Niedermendig it be. The same subordinate official received my ticket and proceeded to punch a small hole in it. I passed on to the platform, at which the train was already drawn up. Smith, behind me, offered his ticket in turn. The subordinate official fixed a subordinately official eye upon it. "Your ticket," he said, "has already a hole punched in it."

"True," replied Smith; "you punched it when I left the station."

"But why," asked the subordinate official, "had your friend's ticket no hole punched in it?"

"You did not punch a hole in his ticket when he left the station," answered Smith reasonably.

"I ought to punch a hole in your ticket now," said the subordinate official sombrely.

"Then punch no hole now," said Smith, "and the hole already punched will serve instead of the hole which ought to be punched now."

"That is forbidden," said the subordinate official; "wait a moment."

Hereupon he went and fetched the not so subordinate station-master. The train continued to be drawn up at the platform.

"Your ticket," began the station-master, looking at Smith, "has already a hole punched in it."

"Yes," replied Smith, unshaken; "he punched it when I left the station."

"His friend's ticket," put in the subordinate official, "had no hole punched in it."

"Why had your friend's ticket no hole punched in it?" asked the station-master.

"He did not punch a hole in my friend's ticket when he left the station," said Smith, with lucidity.

"He ought to punch a hole in your ticket now," said the station-master severely.

"Then," answered Smith ingeniously, "let him punch no hole now and let the hole already punched serve instead of the hole which ought to be punched now."

"That," said the station-master with great firmness, "is forbidden; wait a moment."

He disappeared into his lair. The train continued to be drawn up at the platform. Presently the station-master reappeared and gave the ticket to the subordinate official, who punched a hole in it with care and handed it back to Smith. We entered the train, which had not been delayed a quarter of an hour by these activities, and left the station. Smith turned over his ticket, read the inscription there, and passed it over. I read

it also. We looked at one another. There was no spirit left in us. "The upper hole," said the inscription, "means nothing. The true hole is below."

I think, said the Professor, tasting and then pushing away his cup of tea, now quite cold, I think I have remembered the words exactly.

The Professor, and perhaps the others also, dedicated a few moments to the silent contemplation of a *baba au rhum*. Presently he went on: But the palmary example of their never sufficiently to be admired attention to detail and devotion to the Pure Fact, the palmary example of this characteristic of theirs came to my notice only a short while ago. I was in Paris at the time, occupied with some research of which it would perhaps interest you to hear the—ah, yes, the palmary example, to be sure—well, in short, I read of it in the Parisian news-sheets, and am not myself an autoptic authority. But when, a short time afterwards, I had occasion to betake myself to Berlin I had the good fortune to find an eye-witness, a young Silesian damsel, who confirmed all the details of their account.

It was the German Emperor, and he was fain to review his troops of the Posen garrison. He issued to the officer in command orders to this effect, and among them expressly prescribed that the troops should wear, not their usual black cloth trousers with a red stripe down the seam, but white starched trousers instead. The day drew on and the rain fell. Poland, as you are well aware, since it was pointed out by Napoleon, is a

place of mud. It therefore seemed good to the captains of tens and the captains of hundreds, after consultation, in view of the continuous rains, to order their men to don their usual black cloth trousers with the red stripe and not their white starched trousers; but to carry their white starched trousers in their knapsacks.

Forty thousand men appeared on the parade ground in black cloth trousers with a red stripe down the seam, before a vast concourse of spectators. It rained heavily. The general officer in command was aghast, and cried out in a loud voice at the infraction of his Imperial Master's ordinance and the neglect of his Imperial Master's behests. His subordinates, thereupon, drew near and sought to explain how they had proved themselves no less in wisdom than Solomon, Melk of Israel and Judah, but he would have none of it. "They must put on their white starched trousers," he said.

Then was to be seen, in the lyrical speech of the French newspapers, the inenarrable spectacle of forty thousand men in a heavy rain arborating white starched trousers. They drew the white starched trousers about their loins. But officers carry no knapsacks, neither therefore had they white starched trousers, and the day seemed lost. Now did that Providence which watches with an especial care over the destinies of Germany whisper in the ear of the youngest of her captains, who turning to his orderly required of him the white starched trousers he had so lately donned. The others followed eagerly this example, and

presently, the officers being duly covered with the white starched trousers, each of his orderly, the orderlies themselves were concealed, clad in their mere shirts, in the rear ranks, and so went through the review. The spectators were too well trained to smile. There was a certain *sans-culotte* flavour about the business much admired by the French press. The Emperor was unaware of it.

And the Professor refused a second baba, and looked round the table in search of an iced cake.

. . . . .

Tea over, the party went on deck again and settled with cigarettes and a pleasant sense of repletion to hear from Peter Brown

THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND'S TALE

THE STONE HOUSE AFFAIR

SOME men are born to tale-telling; and when others, like myself, have such honours thrust upon them it is an ill day if they lack material as well as competency. Hence a perhaps forlorn hope of compensation has sent me to the Affairs of Athelstan Tubbs for my share in the general entertainment, to-day. I ask only that, should at any time my inefficiency demand more charity than may fitly be expected of this company, our good Master of Ceremonies exert his own last flicker of it in acquainting me with the fact. Let him raise but one admonitory finger and I promise you I will incontinently go hence and be no more seen. After which preamble, and free now of all responsibility, I ask leave to plunge straight into my baptism of fiery criticism by reverting to a certain winter afternoon upon which my own connection with these affairs began.

109 Osnaburg Street. I had the address so clearly in my mind that reference to my pocket-book seemed a superfluous precaution. Yet, as

I stood upon the pavement considering it, so dingy and forbidding a habitation did the house appear that I found it almost impossible to reconcile it with my memories of Athelstan Tubbs. For two years at Winchester his study had adjoined mine, during which time I had ample leisure to note how well, both in the daintiness of his surroundings and the fastidiousness of his person, he earned the nickname of "Miss Tubby." He was, as I remembered him, a good-looking lad, slight and wiry, somewhat of a recluse, with a passionate love of beauty and a sensitiveness which he conquered, but never destroyed, by a strength of will and a fixity of purpose such as I never met in any other boy of my acquaintance. He was older than myself, and left whilst I was still plodding in the fifth. He came, I believe, within an ace of the headship, but he passed out of our lives as quietly as he had lived in them, and I doubt whether there was one of us who dreamed that his personality had counted in the general character of the house. To us he was just "Miss Tubby," though his femininity began and ended with his niceness and the prefix to his name. He had given ample proof of this the first time it had been used within his hearing. He removed his coat slowly and thoughtfully, folding it with his usual care.

"If it's girlish to like your study decent and your clothes and body clean, I'm all that," he said quietly. "If there's any one who thinks it means a bit more, I'll be glad to explain exactly how much. As many as you like, for that matter."

This was in the dormitory, and Collins, the prefect, had clapped him on the back.

"That's all right, Tubby!" he said. "None of us do."

Tubbs smiled doubtfully.

"Very well," he answered. "I don't want to fight, you know, but if I need to, I'd go straight ahead."

As I mounted the steps I reflected on this early witness of the boy's temper. It was the main characteristic of his school career. His mind once settled on a course, he allowed nothing to deflect him from its way. And Billy's last words came back to me.

"Tubby's the man I want. You didn't know Tubby as well as I did. If he remembers me at all, he'll see me through."

I pulled the bell.

It was answered by a somewhat untidy servant-girl, who stared at me for a minute before answering my inquiry.

"That's the second floor," she said at last, and retreated. "A gentleman for Mr. Tubbs, Carter!" I heard her call.

A smart boy in plain dark clothes threw back the door.

"For Mr. Tubbs?" he said respectfully.

"Is he in?"

"Yes, sir. Will you come up?"

I followed him up the dark flight of stairs and along an equally dark passage. He stopped at the end of it, with his hand on the door-knob.

"What name?"

"I don't think Mr. Tubbs will know it," I answered.

Carter nodded sagely and swung the door on its hinges.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said.

The room I entered impressed me with a sense of pleasure, even at first glance. It was only later that I came to notice details, and even then the details were singularly few. Possibly this fact accounted for the eminent satisfactoriness of the whole. Dull, plain paper of the colour of virgin cork; a ladder of oak shelves spanning a deep recess and filled with books; two or three reproductions on the walls; and an old gold-framed mirror tilted above the oaken mantelshelf. For furniture, pushed against the wall a small refectory table, a Jacobean panelled chest, an oak settle smothered in cushions and a silk Persian rug, a small Lancashire dresser, several ladder-backs, and an Oxford lounge-chair on either side the hearth. At the moment, however, it was only Athelstan Tubbs I saw as he rose from one of these and came to meet me.

"Hullo, Brown minor! What is it this time? Not Thucydides?" he said, exactly as if I had just walked in from my six-foot-by-ten sanctum next door.

"That's clever of you!" I answered with a laugh. "How did you know me? and how on earth did you remember the rest?"

"Sit down, old man. This is splendid. Know you? You haven't altered an eyelash, and who that ever knew you could forget your

eternally lost Thucydides? But if it isn't Thucydides, what is it?"

As a matter of fact my mission was urgent, so accepting this invitation I stated it forthwith.

"Do you remember young Franklin?"

"Billy? Rather! He was my fag, you know."

"I'd forgotten. Well, he's in the dickens of a mess. I've just come down from Wooton. He's in gaol there."

Tubbs, who had been lying back in his armchair, pulled himself into a sitting position.

"Wooton?" he said. "But surely his home was Farnham way?"

"So it was," I answered; "but he has been living with an uncle in Yorkshire. To put the whole thing in a nutshell, the uncle has been murdered, and young Billy Franklin is under suspicion."

If I expected any gesture of astonishment I was disappointed, but I am not sure that I did. When I grew to know Tubby better I understood why one learned to expect nothing but take exactly what came. In this case he put his hand across his eyes and leaned back again.

"I see," he said. "And he sent you to me. I haven't seen him since Winchester, but he's a great pal of mine."

"So I gathered. He seemed to know a great deal about you. His major was my chum at school and left the youngster in my care. I got fond of him, and we kept it up. He came up to Oxford the year I went down. I've been abroad, though, for a couple or years with my father,

health-seeking—he, not I—and I lost sight of him. Then I saw this appalling affair in the papers yesterday and went straight up. He told me the whole thing and asked me to come to you. He says you're a marvel at mystery solving. Is that a fact?"

Tubbs waved deprecatory hands.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "I've played about a bit, and some fool or other has put my name in the police news occasionally. That's about the extent of my fame. I'm rather interested in it, if that is what he means." He covered his eyes again. "Tell me."

"Perhaps you read of it?" I suggested.

He made a gesture of dissent.

"Up to my eyes in something else. Never opened a paper for three days. Go on."

"Well, the main facts run thus. Franklin, as I say, lives with the old man—he's his heir, in fact. Two nights ago——"

Tubbs sat up suddenly.

"Wooton, do you say?"

"Wooton."

"Two nights ago?"

I nodded.

"And Franklin likely to be accused of the murder?"

"They seemed to have accumulated a certain amount of evidence against him."

Tubbs sighed and rose to his feet, pressing the bell at his side.

"Pack me a bag, Carter." And then to me: "You'll come, too? You can tell me as we go."

"My bag is still at the inn there," I said shortly.

"Good man!" He threw me an A B C. "Look up the next train."

He busied himself in collecting a few things, which he stowed about his person, and then looked up inquiringly.

"Seven-thirty," I answered. "We ought to be at Wooton by 8.30 in the morning."

"A forty-eight hour old scent," he murmured ruefully. "Did they call in the police the same night?"

I shook my head.

"It was at 3 a.m. The inspector from Wooton wasn't on the spot until breakfast time."

"Right. We'll feed on the train."

Carter came in as he spoke with a mackintosh across his arm.

"Which will you have, sir—coat or Burberry? It's bitter cold and raining."

"Burberry, I think. Bag ready?"

"In the hall, sir."

Tubbs slipped his arms into the garment which the boy held out.

"I'll wire in the morning unless I return to-morrow. Call up a taxi. And just send this telegram for me."

A minute later we heard his whistle and the purr of the answering car.

At St. Pancras he collected half a dozen evening papers and a *Daily Post*. The former he tossed across to me and buried himself for a few minutes in the morning edition.

"Lord!" he said at last. "The vapid verbosity of these penny-a-liners! Anything fresh?"

"Not a word about it," I answered. "I fancy the press has had nothing but the bare facts, and only a meagre version of those."

"So I should gather from this effusion. Well, then, now let me have all you know."

We had a first-class carriage to ourselves, and he leaned back in the corner, legs stretched out, his hand across his eyes, in that characteristic attitude of concentration that was to become so familiar to me.

"I'll go along in my own way, then. Stop me if I don't make myself clear."

Tubby grunted what I took to be an assent, and I settled down to my story.

"Billy Franklin's three years my junior. He must be somewhere about twenty-four, and I understand has been living with this uncle of his ever since he left school. The uncle, I believe, had been a rolling stone, but settled in England seven or eight years ago, and Billy, from that time until now, has regarded Stone House as his home. His father died, you'll remember, when he was at Winchester. So far as I can make out the boy is a bit of a dreamer, with distinctly artistic leanings. He has a studio up there where he sleeps and works, his work being of a varied and as yet unfocussed character, comprising many things, from impressionistic canvas conundrums to metal-slamming—as he puts it—and Japanese prints. However, he has always been very happy, on excellent terms with his

uncle, and assured of a present income of a hundred a year from his dead mother and the old man's money when he died. The night before last he was working late. He had evolved or read up some patent process for wood-blocks, and was printing feverish experiments into the small hours. At two o'clock he says he heard his uncle's door snap, but thought little of it, as the wind was beating on the windows and his own door was rattling against its latch. About half an hour later he fancied he heard a movement in the hall below, and leaving his wet paper and pad upon the block, opened the door to listen. Everything was quiet, but he propped the door open, and though he went back to his table, kept his ears on the alert. Suddenly from the direction of the library there came the sound of something heavy striking the floor, and this is where he blames himself. 'I thought Blake, like a fool, had left the window open and the wind had overturned a fern-pot that stands there,' he said. 'I was pulling the best print of the whole bunch, and just finished padding it before I went to see. I wasn't thirty seconds.' But before he reached the head of the stairs he heard a loud shout—scream, I think he said—and running down the two flights of stairs was in the library in less than a minute. Mr. Beddoes was lying on the hearthrug, blood pouring down his face. He raised his hand as Billy entered and stretched it towards him. 'The scars! The scars!' he cried. Billy feels sure he was trying to tell him something. As the lad knelt beside him he made a violent effort to get

up, but was evidently too badly hurt. He died in Billy's arms ten minutes later, and though the boy had poured brandy between his lips, not one other word did the old man speak."

Tubby moved his hand and blinked at me.

"Scars," he said. "Go on."

"According to Billy, it was not until he laid down what had once been his uncle and rose to his feet that he really began to think. He ran across to the window. It was shut. He called up Blake, the manservant—a kind of butler-valet —and together they scoured the house. There was nothing out of place, and nothing which threw any light upon the murder. A revolver lay under the knee-hole table, a six-chambered thing, full loaded. The police were called in next morning and promptly arrested Billy."

Tubbs sat up and yawned.

"On the principle that they must arrest somebody, if only to show their energy, I suppose," he said.

"Well, not exactly," I answered. "It appears the young ass had received that very morning a threatening letter from some one or other to whom he owed money, and had had an angry discussion with his uncle that evening at dinner —a row, he called it. Moreover, he alone stood to gain anything by the old man's death, and there are the marks of his footprints outside the window."

"I see. Well, come along and let's have some dinner, and then if you won't think me unsociable, I shall curl up with a pipe and get

some sleep. We shall have a busy and interesting day to-morrow."

We ran into Wooton very early in the morning, roused the hotel to serve us with breakfast, and then went round to the gaol. We had no difficulty in obtaining admittance to the prisoner. Tubbs, it appeared, had wired our coming, and Billy had wasted no time in letting the local authorities know that he expected a man down from London to take up the case on his behalf.

One cannot complain of the accommodation His Majesty provides for possible murderers, if Billy's room was a fair example; but in spite of the unexpected comfort of his surroundings the boy looked white and ill.

"Well, this is a funny game, Billy!" Tubbs greeted him.

Billy sprang up from the bed on which he was seated, and a little flush rose in his cheeks. .

"Can't say it strikes *me* like that," he returned. It was evident that his nerves were badly jarred.

"Well, look here, old man, Brown has given me just the outline, and I want to ask you a question or two, and of parts I want your own version over again."

"Yes, that's all right," the lad said. "Go ahead. I'm fed up with it, of course. These fools have had it about a dozen times. They seem to spend their time trying to make me contradict myself. Good Lord—as if I'd have hurt his finger! Why, the old chap has always been decent to *me*."

"Why that emphasis?"

Billy looked up inquiringly.

"You implied he wasn't so to every one."

"Did I? Well, I don't know exactly. But sometimes when he was worked up to it he'd tell rather funny stories about his younger days. He was a bit of a beast to old Blake occasionally, too, and once to a dog—— But it's rotten talking so when the old man's dead."

"Better than when he's alive," Tubbs said cheerily. "Can't hurt him now. *De viventibus* —it *should* be. What about the dog?"

Billy hesitated.

"He was an absolute devil," he said at last. "He wrung its neck like a chicken's. The poor little beast had snapped at him. Only a pup, too."

"Do you know anything of your uncle's past history?"

"Just what he happened to tell me himself at odd times. From my mother I knew only that there was a brother somewhere in South America, and from her tone I'd always gathered he was a bad egg. But he turned up after my pater's death with quite a nice lot of money: sent me to Oxford, and has been a regular father to me ever since."

"What about this row at dinner?"

Billy flushed again.

"He was in the right entirely. I'm an absolute fool over money, and there was a man I got into touch with at college. We played cards, you know, and I ran up debts, and this fellow introduced me to another chap. I can't tell you the

ins and outs. I think I was done badly. Anyway, he advanced money; the sum total of the debts, with Lord knows how much extra for the kindness of taking it on; and then a few years' interest——"

Tubbs nodded.

"I know. And the fellow threatened to sue you?"

"Something of the kind. So I told the old man, and he called me a damned fool."

"Quite right," agreed Tubby.

"Yes, I know. And then he slung all he knew at me, and when it came to insults he could give a long start to any one I've ever met. I was a parasite and a thief and a hypocrite, and all I wanted was his death and his money, etc., etc. I lost my temper and stalked out, saying he might die that very night for all I cared, and a good thing too. There'd be one foul tongue the less in the world. I walked round the garden and called myself what he had called me—a damned fool—looked in at the library window, tapped, begged his pardon, shook hands, went round to the front door, and so up to my studio; and that's the last I saw of him until I found him dying."

"Tell me about that; and I want you to recall everything very carefully and not omit a single detail, however unimportant it may appear to you."

"I was in my studio——"

Tubby interrupted him.

"How does that lie in regard to the rest of the house?"

" It's just a big attic topping the main building. There are two long flights of stairs, each doubling back on itself from a little square half-landing."

Tubby shut his eyes, visualising them.

" Making practically four flights ? "

" That's it," Billy answered. " And the whole top floor is my studio and a couple of small box-rooms."

" What about the servants ? "

" There are only three—Blake, the housekeeper, and a young housemaid. They have quarters to themselves—a separate wing over the kitchen and sculleries—quite shut off from the main portion of the house. I was up there taking some prints until about two o'clock, when I fancied I heard my uncle's door unfasten and shut again. He sleeps on the floor beneath. I thought no more of it, however, though doubtless, as events turned out, he had gone down for something or other—brandy possibly."

" Why brandy ? "

" He's been very seedy latterly—indigestion, he called it; some inside disorganisation anyway, according to Dr. Smeltby ; nothing really serious, but it seems to have entailed a good deal of pain and even sickness, and twice during the last fortnight he has fainted outright. When the nausea worried him he was supposed to take a few teaspoonfuls of spirit. Several times he had needed it in the night, and he's as proud as Lucifer—loathes asking any one else's assistance, and won't keep it in his room."

He paused, but Tubbs made no comment, and he continued his narrative.

"Half an hour after that I fancied I heard some one in the hall, and went out to the landing to listen, leaning over the banisters for a minute or two. I could hear nothing, however, so back I went to my work as before, except that I wedged the door open and kept straining my ears for some other sound. When it came it was a loud bump, evidently from the ground floor, and, as I thought, the library, though of course one couldn't judge very well. Like a fool, instead of going straight away to find out the cause, I put it down to an overturned flower-pot, and finished padding down my pull. It certainly wasn't more than a minute or two at the outside before I was creeping down the stairs. Uncle's a light sleeper and hates to be waked. I wondered at his not being already disturbed by the fall I heard. I was half way down the first half-flight when I heard a scream—horrible, it was, hoarse and broken—and I covered the rest of them at the double."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Tubby. "I want this very clear. At what point would you first see the hall?"

"As I turned for the last half-flight."

"Did you notice anything? I mean, can you recall any circumstance which struck you, bearing or not bearing on the situation?"

"It was dark," Billy answered, "except for a streak of light where the library door curtain had been swung back on its rings a few inches."

"You noticed nothing?"

"There wasn't a sound audible above my own footsteps. The curtain wafted out in the draught. I noticed that."

Tubby looked at him.

"The curtain? Oh, yes—the door curtain."

"I rushed across the hall. It's stone-flagged, and I remember noting my own clatter. There's a kind of resonance in that hall—most odd. I wondered I did not hear my uncle crossing it. As a matter of fact he had slipped on bedroom shoes."

"And you found him dying?"

"I thought at first that he was dead, but he opened his eyes and tried to point towards something. 'The scars!' he muttered. 'The scars!' I got him brandy and poured it down his throat, but it was no use. He never spoke again."

"And his wound?"

"Something had been thrown at him, I should think, or he had been struck with a heavy weapon. There was a terrible cut just above his eye, and his face was literally streaming with blood."

"What was the medical opinion?"

Billy considered a moment.

"The blow itself was not sufficient to cause death. It was partly shock. He was in a bad state of health, they said, and the heart was practically played out."

"That was the conclusion Dr. Smeltby came to?"

"Not Smeltby. He left the neighbourhood a month ago. Uncle had called in another man

only last week. I had a conversation with him the very morning of the day on which the thing happened. He told me uncle's condition was very unsatisfactory, and that he wanted another opinion. My uncle refused to consider this. He had a rooted aversion to all doctors except Smeltby, and only consented to my fetching Munro because he was really a little scared by his last faint. Munro warned me that he must be spared any excitement. That was why I felt such a hog over the row at dinner. I didn't kill him, thank God, but it wasn't my fault that I didn't. The mere excitement of discussion was pretty well enough, if Munro knows what he's talking about."

Tubby nodded.

"Did Smeltby realise how serious your uncle's state of health was?" he said.

"If he did he never told uncle or me."

Athelstan Tubbs looked thoughtful.

"What sort of man was he?"

"Oh, a queer-looking chap with a great red beard, red hair, spectacles, and a limp. An awful clever fellow, I believe. My uncle swore by him, and he certainly knew what to do when the old man was specially seedy."

"Did he go away without handing over the case to another medical man?"

"Yes. I've thought about that since—since I saw Munro, I mean. Munro spoke rather strongly on the subject. My own opinion is that he underrated things. But uncle was very keen on him. He, too, had travelled a good deal for one

thing. I rather fancy they exchanged experiences."

"They had never met before, I suppose?"

Billy shook his head.

"I don't think so. Uncle never suggested it, nor did I ever get the idea from anything he ever said."

"Where has he gone?"

"Abroad again, on some business or other. Uncle knew all about it. For an indefinite time. He's let the house furnished to some funny old fossil of a professor. It's about three quarters of a mile from us across the moor."

"I see. Well—you called up Blake, I understand, and searched the house. You say you found nothing suspicious and nothing out of place."

"A chair had been overturned in the library. That was all. Every window was fastened and the doors locked as usual."

Athelstan Tubbs stood up and stretched himself.

"All right, Billy," he said. "I'll go along to Stone House and sniff around for myself. Other things may have turned up since you came here. Don't bother over much. This arresting of you is a small instance of bucolic wit, I imagine. You seem fairly comfortable. We'll send you in some books and papers. Oh, just one other thing. Have you the vaguest idea what your uncle meant by those last words of his? Did they convey anything to you? The scars! The scars!' They were curious, weren't they?"

Young Franklin hesitated.

"There was just one idea that came to me afterwards," he said slowly. "I told you that I always thought my uncle's past life—his time in South America especially—had been a little—well, coloury. He had some astounding tales of adventures there. And at one time he was gold-digging, and I rather fancy had jumped a claim. My own impression is he made his pile that way, such as it was. He's quite the pluckiest man I ever met, but he has a wholesome horror of that claim's original owner. 'Ugly beggar he was,' he said to me once. 'With a great scar right across both cheeks. I won the claim quite fairly for that matter, but he swore he'd have me if he ran me across two hemispheres. He's doing time, though, thank the Lord!' I could see it was a real scare. He'd even carry a revolver about with him. He had tried to use it too. It was on the floor near him. Well, the idea came to me that maybe this man was free at last, and he tried to tell me who it was that had murdered him." He stopped short. "Sounds like a twopenny awful, doesn't it?" he said frankly.

"Not a bit," returned Tubby. "Likeliest thing in the world. Truth and fiction, you know. Extraordinarily correct, that adage. Well—ta, ta!"

Once outside, Tubby hurried me across to the hotel, and within a quarter of an hour we were trundling along in the direction of Stone House as fast as the proprietor's own trotter could take us.

It was a big rambling block of grey stone tucked away in a desolate dip of the moor, and fully three quarters of a mile from any other habitation.

A long drive led up from the moor road to the broad sweep before the house, and the gravel crunched and spluttered beneath our wheels as we drove up.

A short stout man in grey tweeds was standing at the top of the steps, whom Tubby hailed almost before we drew rein.

"Hullo, Baxter! Down from the Yard already?"

"Hullo, Mr. Tubbs! Hot on, as usual!" He beamed at my friend through keen and kindly eyes, and held out his hand. "I came down by the midnight train," he said. "And you?"

"Earlier. I've been interviewing young Franklin."

Baxter sniffed.

"Over-reached themselves there," he said. "Heard the latest? They've found a pair of his boots sitting in the heather beyond the grounds there—soaked through with the rain. Blake identifies them as the boots he wore last night. They're quite upset about it."

Tubbs raised his eyebrows inquiringly, and Baxter chuckled.

"Throws their reckoning out. You see, their theory was that after young Mr. Franklin bounced out of the house in a temper he tramped the moor or grounds until the domestics had retired to bed, came back, stood at his uncle's library

window, continued the quarrel, lost his temper still worse, climbed in over the low sill and struck the old man down; after which he went up to bed, and then raised the alarm an hour or so later. However, as it didn't rain until three yesterday morning, it follows that he must have gone out after that hour for the express purpose of carrying his boots a quarter of a mile from the house and there leaving them—though even the brains of our friend the local inspector can't suggest any reason for such a manœuvre. As a matter of fact there isn't a trace of damp on any other of his footwear, and the idea of his doing even the single journey with bare feet is not very plausible. But beyond that Blake vouches for his never leaving the house after the tragedy occurred. And to floor them even more effectually, the housemaid had toothache that night and was up a good deal doctoring herself. Her window looks across towards the studio, and she vows she saw Mr. Franklin working there just after two. She is sure of the time, because she looked at her watch, wondering at his being so late. And what is more important still, she swears also that five minutes after that, she saw some one in the grounds. She can't describe him, but she mistook him for Mr. Beddoes; and as Mr. Beddoes is fully six feet and Mr. Franklin unusually short——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

Tubbs laughed and sauntered up the steps.

"Rather a useful bit of evidence," he said.

"That's so. Well, well—I know you like to

go your own way, and I have the same inclinations myself, so we'll part company."

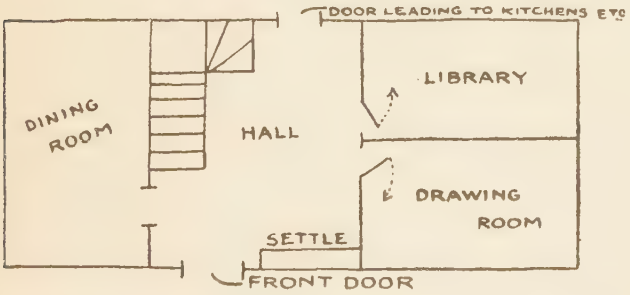
Athelstan Tubbs beckoned and slipped his arm in mine a moment.

"Leave me to myself now, old chap, there's a brick. I'm up to my neck in theories that I want to sift. Come with me or leave me, just as you please, only if you love me don't speak."

"I'll stick like a limpet, if I may, and be as silent."

"That's it," he returned, withdrew his arm, and started on his task.

The ground floor of Stone House comprised—in addition to the kitchens, which formed a wing in themselves—a big square, stone-flagged hall, out of which opened the drawing-room, dining-room, and library, arranged on the plan of this sketch, which perhaps you will pass round.



Alongside the front door stood a long oak settle, and beneath it a row of a dozen or more boots and shoes. Beyond this there was no hall

furniture of any kind. The door of each room was covered by a heavy plush curtain, hanging straight and unlooped.

Tubbs stood in the centre of the stone floor for several minutes. Then he ran up the half-stairs, stood on the topmost, and peered about like an owl; walked slowly down, still peering, returned and ran down at full speed. Halting at the oak settle he stooped and stared at the footwear beneath, after which, apparently satisfied, he turned his attention to the library. The dead man had been carried upstairs. A constable was on guard, but on Tubbs explaining his position in the case he left us to ourselves.

I was intensely interested in Tubbs's methods, though I do not pretend that they conveyed to me anything but the vaguest idea as to where they tended. In some details I was utterly mystified.

He examined the floor from end to end with the minutest care, even going to the length of lying flat on his face with a pocket magnifying-glass. He opened the window, hung out, smiled at the foot-prints in the soft earth beneath it, shut it, tried the catch, ran his lens all over the paint of the sill, picked up all the fireirons, scrutinising them closely, examined the revolver which had been left upon the table, sat down in the armchair and laughed softly.

"Not the ghost of a clue," he said. "Not that I expected it. Come along, we'll go and look at the poor old chap himself."

Mr. Beddoes was lying upon his bed, and

Tubbs's eyes narrowed as he saw the marks upon the forehead.

"Lord, what a blow!" he said. "And I needn't have troubled about the poker."

"Why not?" I hazarded timidly, mindful of my orders.

"Fist, that is," he returned shortly. "And a signet ring."

He leaned over the old man and looked at him long and earnestly. I saw his eyes travel over the shoulders, arms, and chest. Suddenly they focussed, and the whole man seemed to grow tense and stiff like a sporting dog. His fingers picked something from the velvet pile of the coat lapel. Then he straightened, pulled out his watch, opened it, deposited his find in safety, snapped the case, and smiled at me.

"I think it's Blake," he said.

"What—who murdered him?" I cried.

"Lord, no! Whom I want to see. Touch the bell, old man. No, wait! I'll see him in the library."

We returned there and rang the bell. It was answered by a little, nervous-looking man, unliveried, but with that quiet air of capability and deference which somehow marks the good servant.

"You are Blake?" Tubbs queried pleasantly.

"Yes, sir."

"I want to ask you a few questions. Please answer as carefully and correctly as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"The clothes your master is wearing——"

"Mr. Beddoes, sir?"

Tubbs looked surprised, and the colour crept into the valet's face.

"Of course, sir—Mr. Beddoes. Yes, sir. You see, sir, Mr. Franklin—well, sir, till old Mr. Franklin died I was down in Surrey with them, and when Mr. Beddoes, so to speak, adopted Mr. William, I managed to come too."

"I see. Well, do you valet Mr. Beddoes?"

"Yes, sir. Him and Mr. William too, sir."

"I thought that coat of his very dusty."

The man's face was pathetic.

"It went to my heart not to brush it, sir, when they carried him up, but they'd have nothing touched. Shocking it was. Cigar-ash and all. But it was fresh enough when he put it on for dinner. He's very particular about his dinner coat."

"Does Mr. Beddoes always wear a velvet coat in the evenings?"

"Always, sir."

"Has he more than one?"

"Not at present, sir. One on order, sir."

"And you brush it every day, of course?"

Blake's face was a study of injured dignity. Tubbs hastened to propitiate him.

"Tell me, Blake, are you equally particular over the gentlemen's boots? I suppose they come within your province?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I do the boots myself entirely."

"There seems to be a goodly string of them under the settle in the hall. Is that the boot-cupboard?"

Blake smiled.

"Not exactly, sir, but both Mr. Beddoes and Mr. Franklin like to have a few handy. They go in and out a good deal, and we get a fair bit of mud hereabouts. They just put a pair on and throw them down there again. It's my business to see that there's always several clean pairs there, and that the wet ones are dried."

"It was a funny thing, this finding of Mr. Franklin's boots on the moor."

Something flickered across the man's face: something like a shadow of fear.

"When did you miss them?"

"I didn't miss them, sir. Everything seemed flustered yesterday. I never did the boots nor yet noticed them. It was only to-day when they brought them in, sir, and asked was there any other damp ones. There weren't no damp ones at all, sir—not one, sir."

"There weren't, I suppose, another pair left in place of the wanderers?"

His eyes were watching keenly, and the old man hesitated. Tubby laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, Blake, just remember this. I'm working for Mr. William. We know that he had nothing to do with it, and anything you can possibly tell me will help rather than hurt him."

The valet's mouth trembled.

"He's as dear as a son to me, sir—if it ain't a liberty to say so."

Tubbs patted him.

"Not a bit," he answered. "Now then."

"Well, sir, there *was* a pair of boots, sir. Strangers, they were. They were in the row

under the settle, same as if they was the family. I noticed them the moment I came to look. Nice boots they were, too. A size bigger than Mr. William's; but—well, I put them away before any one saw them. They weren't damp exactly, but they'd been used."

Tubbs's eyes narrowed again, and he flicked up his head with a curious little gesture I remembered at school.

"I shall want those." Then as the man turned to leave the room: "No—later on. Now tell me, Blake, have you the faintest suspicion in your mind as to the meaning of this horrible affair?"

The valet shook his head.

"Not the least, sir," he answered. "There doesn't seem no object in it."

"You are quite convinced there was no burglary about it? No silver—money—jewellery gone?"

"No silver," Blake said with decision. "Nor yet money, I shouldn't think. The master paid mostly by cheque. He never kept much cash in the house, and no jewellery."

"No drawers or cupboards ransacked?"

"No, sir, none. At least——" He hesitated.

"Well?" Tubby urged.

"Well," Blake repeated, "there was one thing I noticed. Not at the time, but next morning. It seemed so small that I never mentioned it. It was that cigar-cabinet. The door was swung open and the box of cigars gone. I could swear they was there when I dusted this room the day before."

Tubbs looked across at the cabinet. It was a big affair in mahogany. Evidently the same idea struck him as had occurred to me.

"Was there only one box?" he asked.

"You see, sir, the master never smoked till latterly. He couldn't abide it. These was something special as the doctor had recommended him. Helped him to sleep, he told me, sir. He'd have two a day regular; one just after lunch and one before he went to bed."

"Good habit, too," Tubbs said heartily. "And they were gone, you say?"

"I've searched the house, sir."

"Funny," Tubbs said. "Probably Mr. Beddoes has put them away himself—a drawer in his bedroom, perhaps."

Blake looked his doubts, but was too well trained to express them.

"And this doctor—a big man, I understand."

"Not big, sir; I shouldn't call him big; a bit tall perhaps, but slight, sir; small made. Very thin face, sir, with a red beard and hair, and lame in one leg."

"Lame?"

"He limped, sir; used a stick generally."

"And a great friend of Mr. Beddoes?"

"Very, sir. The master took a great fancy to him. He was very cut-up about his going: fairly pined, according to my idea. Not been the same man since."

"I see." Athelstan Tubbs was gazing out of the window. "About those boots," he said at last.

"Yes, sir—I'll get them."

He was back in a few minutes.

Tubbs set them on the writing-table, side by side, and watched them, his head a little on one side, like an intelligent terrier. I think he stood so for fully five minutes. Then he turned them up, examined the soles and heels, slipped his hand into first one and then the other, dangled them at arm's length and smiled.

"Interesting things, boots," he said quietly. "A good pair, too, as you say, Blake, though there's no maker's name. Thank you very much. I think that is all. You have helped me considerably."

But Blake lingered.

"You'll excuse me, sir. You do think it's all right about Mr. William?" he asked tremulously.

"Good Lord, yes! He'll be back in a day or so, I promise you."

The man's face brightened, and Tubby smiled across at me as he left the room.

"There's a good faithful soul," he said. "And now I'm going to explore the garden, though I expect these zealous bumpkins have trampled it like a horse-fair. Unless you are particularly in love with your present surroundings I wish you'd head back to Wooton—take the gig—and send off a wire to Carter not to expect me for a day or two. Then get your lunch comfortably. I shall probably prowl round for an hour or two, and may not be in till late afternoon."

There was no other course open to me than to agree.

"What time shall I send back the trap?" I asked.

"Not at all," he answered shortly; then, thinking, I suppose, that his tone sounded ungracious, he added with one of his brilliant smiles: "I like a long tramp when I'm slogging out a theory."

It was close on six when he turned up. By that time I had exhausted Wooton as a "sight" and all the hotel current literature, so that I was not sorry when he put his head round the smoking-room door. I was the only occupant, and weary of my own society. I sprang up with alacrity.

"Ready for a meal?" he said.

He had ordered a kind of high tea and ate ravenously. He had consumed a couple of eggs and was engaged on a plate of cold ham when the waiter entered with a message.

"Yes," Tubbs said. "Ask him to join us at tea. It's Baxter," he continued, as the man left the room, and almost as he spoke that excellent representative of London's anti-criminal organisation made his appearance.

Tubby waved him a cheery good evening.

"Tea?"

But the detective shook his head.

"No, thank you, Mr. Tubbs. Too busy. I just ran in to tell you we've got our man."

Tubbs laid down his knife and fork and stared at him.

"Got your man?" he repeated blankly.

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't quite say 'got'

him," the other admitted. "Marked him, would be more accurate. It's only a question of hours, though, if that, before we lay our hands on him."

My friend pushed away his plate and lit a cigarette.

"Who is he?" he asked shortly.

"Well, it isn't Mr. Franklin," Baxter replied playfully.

"So I imagine."

Baxter smiled.

"How have your own investigations gone?" he asked.

"Nothing very definite," Tubby returned. "I've been on the moor practically all day."

"Ah, very healthy, but not much to the point in this case, I'm afraid." The man was obviously swelling with importance. "Now *I* turned my attention to Wooton here—the inns, and Stone House itself."

"Yes?" said Tubby.

Baxter launched forth.

"Of course it was quite clear to me that practically the most valuable point in all the evidence was Mr. Beddoes' dying speech—'The scars! The scars!' Now, on questioning Mr. Franklin on this point I learned that for many years the old gentleman has nourished a horror of a scarred face. It appears he definitely feared an attack from a man so marked, and even went to the length of carrying about with him a loaded revolver."

Tubbs nodded.

"I heard that myself."

"But thought nothing of it?"

"Oh, yes, I thought of it," Tubby said evasively.

"Didn't follow it up? A pity that, Mr. Tubbs, a pity. As a matter of fact the whole solution turned on it. After inquiries I found that on the very morning of the murder a shabbily dressed man with a curious and very noticeable scar had been seen in the village. This I followed up, and elicited from Mr. Beddoes's housemaid that this identical man had stopped her on her way to the village with letters for the afternoon post, and asked her the name of the occupant of Stone House. He passed on along the moor road, she says, but so remarkable was the disfigurement of his face that she took particular notice of him and was able to furnish quite minute details of his general appearance and clothes. These have been telegraphed to every village within twenty miles, and to the railway stations within reachable foot distance. At present we have had no affirmative reply, but, as I say, it is only a matter of a very short time. It is really almost a pity that you troubled to come, Mr. Tubbs. I am disappointed myself. Too simple altogether. Too simple, I mean, to have made it worth my while to leave town, though, upon my word, even in a plain and open case like this it is incredible how at sea these country fellows are! At all events—a whiff of the heather, Mr. Tubbs, a whiff of the heather! Eh!"

"Exactly. Well, I'm glad you've settled it all up. Absurdly simple, as you say. I admit

I rather thought there was more in it, but if you've got your man—well, you've got him, and there's nothing more to be said. Still, as we are here, what say you, Brown? As Mr. Baxter suggests, a whiff of the heather is not to be despised, even at the risk of repetition. Or have you already had enough? Would a walk appeal to you?"

"Nothing I should like better," I returned heartily.

"I suppose you won't join us, Mr. Baxter?"

Mr. Baxter's expression was one of polite tolerance.

"I'm afraid," he said. "We professionals have to take things rather more seriously I have the ends to tie up, so to speak; and then there's Mr. Franklin. I think I can manage to send him home to-night. So—er——"

"Of course," Tubby agreed. "One is apt to forget the importance of things. But the penalty of every art, you know, is its attraction for the dilettante."

"Have you any prejudice against breaking the law?" he went on as our friend retired.

I laughed.

"It rather depends on the character of the infringement."

"This will be trespass, and possibly a little mild house-breaking."

"Quite a normal amusement of mine," I said.

"Good!" he returned. "Put on something warm, and a mackintosh; I don't like the way the clouds scurried up after the sunset." He

stuck his head out of the open window and sniffed luxuriously. "It's rain, right enough; but how this moor air satisfies your lungs!"

"Which way?" I asked, as we turned out of the hotel entrance.

"Same old road," he answered contentedly.

We trudged along in silence, he with his chin sunk on his chest, his hands deep in the pockets of his Burberry, his shoulders hunched in the manner of his schoolboy days. How many times I had seen him so on the footer field or pacing the quad, his lips moving as he went.

"Look here!" he broke out suddenly. "You mustn't think me a surly oyster. The fact is I am so used to a lone hand, and when I'm working on anything I have got the habit of rolling up any idea and closing on it like a hedgehog. It's the nature of the beast. You'll understand, won't you? I promise you shall have every detail when it's clear. That is, of course, if it interests you," he added somewhat shyly.

"My dear fellow," I returned, "I'm feverishly interested and aching with curiosity, but I am still capable of understanding the necessity for harbouring your reasoning faculties. I'm more than satisfied to be allowed to look on."

"Good chap!" he said with a sigh of relief, and did not utter another word until we were in sight of Stone House.

As soon, however, as its chimneys appeared in silhouette above the sweep of the moor, to my surprise he turned abruptly from the road and struck off across the heather.

"Short cut," he said. "Turn up your trousers. There's a heavy dew."

A few minutes later we dropped down into a narrow lane. Our footsteps resounded on the hard surface, and Tubby laid his hand on my shoulder and drew me to a standstill.

"It's the outer drive of the Barons," he whispered. "Scramble up again. I'm taking no risks. Some one may be about and hear us."

We crawled up and continued our way, following the course of the lane below in absolute silence save for the swish-swish of the heather as it brushed against our ankles.

As we neared the house the heather thinned, the lane rose gradually to the level on which we were walking, and a somewhat dilapidated stone wall fronted us, stretching to left and right, and forming, I suppose, the boundary of the actual grounds. There was no gate, although from a couple of crumbling posts the remnants of some former glory swung on crazy hinges and creaked dismally in the wind.

For whatever purpose we were there—and I myself could not hazard the vaguest conjecture—it was quite evident from Tubby's general behaviour that secrecy played no small part in its successful furthering; and I rejoiced accordingly when the moon, which had been flinging a generous sheen of silver over the whole landscape, slid suddenly behind a heavy cloud and left us in darkness.

"What luck!" Tubby grunted. "Cut across this open space before she shows again."

We covered the last quarter of a mile in excellent style—outwardly, at least. But I confess I groaned in my heart, and registered many vows as to future training and a fitness which the locust of soft living had so greedily devoured. Tubbs, on the contrary, ran without effort, and when we came to a halt beneath the shadow of a blank, unwindowed wall, he whispered to me from lungs as untroubled as a sleeping child's.

"You're pumped," he said, rather to my annoyance. "Wait here and renovate whilst I take bearings."

As he disappeared I sat down on a large and exceedingly irregular stone against which I had just grazed my shin, and wondered, panting heavily, why in Heaven's name I had ever left my comfortable rooms in Chelsea for any Billy Franklin, and why, that foolishness once admitted, I should have trebled its absurdity by abandoning the peace of the hotel smoking-room for the pursuit of so wild-goose a chase as this. I rubbed the outraged bone gently and sympathetically, and when I had recovered sufficient breath, snarled quietly to myself. Then Tubbs came round the corner, silently as a cat, and forgetting all about Chelsea and the hotel, I sprang to my feet.

"It's round here," he whispered.

"What?" I queried.

"The garage. I can't explain. Come on!" He breathed the sentences into my ear and pressed my shoulder hard, as if to squeeze me into silence. "Quietly."

I followed in his wake, and round the angle of the wall he dropped on his hands and knees.

"Windows," he said.

Not for a moment did any other course occur to me than that of slavish imitation, and in this manner we proceeded along some thirty yards of gravel path, recently watered, I should say, judging from its adhesive properties. But in spite of my unquestioning tractability the humour of the situation struck me, and had it not been for my companion's intense seriousness I believe I should have laughed outright. I really am a thoroughly respectable member of society—nothing by profession, an artist by taste—whose wildest adventures hitherto had comprised nothing more thrilling than the normal happenings of a yearly "shoot" at my uncle's place in Scotland, and an occasional punt tour on one of the unfrequented tributaries of the Thames. And here I was, at 9 p.m. on a chilly February evening, for some unknown purpose crawling furtively round a gentleman's country house, with every probability of being shot at or arrested for attempted burglary, and the certainty of wrecking irretrievably the trousers of a new serge suit for which I had just paid nine guineas to a Bond Street tailor. I feel that it is only fair to myself and to my really irreproachable relations to state quite clearly that the position in which I found myself was unusual and experimental. However, so closely did I dog Tubby in the little procession that he trampled my fingers as he rose unexpectedly to his feet. But by this time I believe excite-

ment really had me in its grip. At any rate I barely noticed the pain, and was genuinely puzzled next day by the soreness of my three discoloured nails.

"We're fairly safe here," Tubby said quietly. "This little place is an annex at the end of the building, and so far as I can see that window we passed is the only lighted one."

I looked back. We had traversed the entire front of the house, and a broad band of light was thrown across the lawn from a window at the far end. The garage receded a little from the main elevation, so that, as Tubby insinuated, we were practically invisible from the house itself. It was too dark for me to watch my companion's operations, but I gathered he had a set of skeleton keys. At any rate the door swung open in response to his ministrations, and we slipped inside.

"Shut the door," Tubby muttered, and as he flicked on his electric torch I could see that his hands were trembling.

There was one car only—a little sporting model Morgan. Tubby lay on his side, wriggled beneath the body, and glued his face to the back wheel.

I heard him grunt, and he emerged with a little shrug of impatience.

"Pull her out a bit. That's it!"

He bent down, turned his torch upon the tyre again, and almost immediately straightened his back.

"Look here, old man."

I stooped over as he went on. "New tyre that, isn't it? Three studs gone. Do you see? One—two—three—left—right—left—a triangle with an eight-inch base. That so?"

"That's it," I agreed.

"That's all right, then. Now I'm going to have a glimpse through that window. We're closing up, I fancy."

I followed him to within six feet of the sill, but he turned suddenly and waved me away. I crawled back like a disappointed dog, sitting down with my back against the garage door and rebellion in my heart. I could not see him from where I was, and even had I been able, was too injured to watch.

It must have been fully a quarter of an hour later when he slipped down alongside.

"Brown," he whispered, "we're hot on, as our friend Baxter would say. And there's nothing like a blow while the iron's red. But there's considerably more than an element of risk in this, and I'm not at all sure I'm justified in letting you run it. At the same time I must have some one. It would take hours to fetch Baxter, and meanwhile——"

He stopped, and I heard him flicking his thumb and finger in a way he had when worried or uncertain.

"I rather enjoy risks," I said with temporary veracity.

"Do you?" he said eagerly.

"Can you tell me at all what the situation is likely to be?"

"The man in there killed old Beddoes," he said grimly.

"Good Lord!"

"Yes, I know," he returned impatiently. "But I'm going to try to get him, and I want some one to help."

"All right," I said. "What's your plan of action?"

"I'm just going to ring the front-door bell."

It seemed a curious way of arresting a murderer, but I think I had got beyond the capacity for astonishment. I rose to my feet and laughed.

"Sounds rather tame," I said. "But let's try it."

Tubby nipped my arm with his thin fingers.

"Good egg!" he said, like a schoolboy, and I felt ridiculously elated at the compliment.

We heard the bell peal through the house in answer to a lusty pull, and almost immediately shuffling steps approached beyond the studded door. A bolt shot back, and as the oak swung generously wide an old man stood in the aperture. Silhouetted against the light, one saw only the extreme thinness of his figure and the stoop of his rounded shoulders.

"I wanted to see you, Professor Carson," my companion said.

"Ah, yes. And your name?"

The timbre of the voice was unexpected—unusually pleasing, and with a certain vague quality that somehow disconcerted me. I fancy some such feeling affected Tubby also. He hesitated.

"I hardly think it will enlighten you," he said at last. "You don't know me—Athelstan Tubbs."

"You are over-modest, Mr. Tubbs," the professor said quietly, and led the way across the brick-tiled hall towards a door at the far end. He hesitated, however, with his hand upon the knob. "You would prefer the laboratory, perhaps?" he said.

Tubbs stopped in his stride and stared at him. I fancied I read amazement written in his face.

"I should," he said at last.

"So I gathered," the professor said genially.

A little frown crossed the other's forehead. The old man chuckled.

"Your expression was so obviously one of interest as you viewed it from the garden. Come in, Mr. Athelstan Tubbs."

For a minute Tubby was nonplussed, but he flung back his head with a little laugh.

"*Touché*, doctor, *touché*!" he said.

He laid no stress on the second word, but the professor's eyes narrowed. For the fraction of a moment a sudden light flickered in them. Then he nodded.

"Come in, Mr. Tubbs," he said. "I'm glad to see you."

He ushered us into the room which he had just left. It was fitted as a chemical laboratory, but with several easychairs and an end wall lined with books. On the table lay a dead white rabbit, and in a small hutch propped upon a side shelf crouched a living one. I saw the professor glance at it as he motioned us to be

seated. A curious expression passed across his face, and I think he took a step in its direction. But he turned, dropped into a low lounge-chair and leaned back against the cushions.

"And the object of your visit?" he said.

"Several as yet uncertain details connected with Mr. Beddoes's—death," Tubby answered, pausing before the last syllable of the sentence.

"Your choice of word is admirable, Mr. Tubbs. It evidences perspicacity as well as—shall we say?—refinement."

Tubbs looked him full in the eyes.

"It is not my business to jump to conclusions," he said quietly.

"Then may I suggest a bargain, Mr. Tubbs? You shall give me in detail and sequence such conclusions as you have arrived at by slower and more exact progression, and I in return will furnish you with my full and complete—how shall we term it?—story of the crime."

Tubby sprang to his feet and paced restlessly up and down the room. The old man watched him with something like a smile hovering round his lips.

"See here," my companion said at last, coming to a standstill on the hearthrug and staring down at the long thin figure stretched out before him, "I'm not particularly happy about this business. I haven't an atom of doubt, mind you But I fancy the whole affair is a bit damnable."

"Wherein, my boy," said the professor, "you show something deeper even than perspicacity. And now I am all attention."

Tubby crossed to his vacated chair. Then he shrugged his shoulders as if to fling from them a responsibility which he disliked, and said whimsically :

" What exactly do you want me to tell you ? "

Professor Carson opened his eyes and regarded him gravely.

" The chain of reasoning which brought you to my unfortunate self," he said.

" There was nothing so solid as a chain. It was rather a number of gossamer threads stretching in one direction, ridiculously unreliable in themselves, but weaving into quite a reasonable rope when viewed in combination. Of course the idea of Billy's being implicated was absurd. I had the advantage of knowing him. There was very little to help in his story of the affair, but just one or two things struck me. There was the rather curious temper of his uncle, for instance. A man who will strangle a dog in a moment of anger is likely to have made enemies at different times of his life. And his treatment of Billy had shown that he was also worthy of friends. As a matter of fact the boy had a very genuine affection for him. Then there was a statement which Billy made about the curtain of the library door. He spoke of its wafting out as he came downstairs. When he added later that no window was open I knew that since there could be no draught to account for the movement, some one had passed out into the darkness of the hall ; and when, later still, at Stone House I saw the dining-room door was actually alongside and

similarly curtained, it was quite obvious that the some one had slipped from one curtain to another, and so waited until the coast was clear enough for escape. The finding of Billy's boots set my mind working, and suggested that the visitor had taken off his own for the sake of quietness, snatching up the wrong pair in a hurried retreat. It even occurred to me that he was probably familiar with the house, inasmuch as he had left his own in the place allotted by its particular customs, and I promptly put on the drag, so to speak, to prevent what I mentioned just now—hasty conclusions. That is the main danger of this kind of work. The first really definite clue was one of your red hairs which I found on the lapel of Mr. Beddoes's coat."

The professor sat up and stared at my companion.

"Red hairs?" he ejaculated.

Tubby drew his watch from his pocket and held it out across the hearthrug. The old man took it in his hand and examined it with undisguised interest. Then he leaned back, and to my amazement shook with silent laughter.

"Go on," he said at last.

"Then," continued Tubby, "there were your boots."

"Ah, yes," said the other; "my boots."

"Well, of course they gave you away again. I mean the limp."

"How the limp?"

Tubbs wrinkled his forehead, hesitating for a moment.

"That's A B C when you come to think of it. Limping as you do, the principal wear is on the sound foot. The heel of the other barely touches ground, and what wear there is, is on the inside of the front half of the sole. You walk—that is—on the ball of the big toe, practically. Red hair and a limp, you know, and a friend of the house, seemed to settle it. I took the precaution of finding out whether the red hair could be one of old standing, but I found that Blake was a careful valet. He helped me considerably, did Blake. It was he who called my attention to the cigars. I had been puzzling over Mr. Beddoes's last words—'The scars! The scars!—but of course your rifling of the tobacco-cabinet explained matters. It was 'The cigars!' the old man had said. The words are easily mistaken. So by this time I had it fairly clear that for some reason or other you had come back to remove the box of cigars which you had recommended and possibly given to your patient. That whilst so doing you had been discovered by Mr. Beddoes himself, who had been in the dining-room. His revolver and the fist-blow pointed to his threatening you and your striking in self-defence. He probably stumbled over a chair as he entered, and so warned you. Then—or so I argued—you heard Billy coming downstairs, snatched the box of cigars, and slipped through the curtain. Later, when Billy was occupied with his dying uncle, you ventured across the hall, grabbed your boots and bolted. Beyond the grounds you halted, discovered your mistake, and left the boots.

You climbed down the bank there in your stockinged feet and padded along the road. Of course there were no tracks, but three times over I found the ferule-hole of your stick, and when you branched off down that clearing it was as regular as footprints. I guessed you were very footsore and were leaning heavily. Then they stopped, and I was at sea, but I scoured round for an hour or so, struck that by-lane, and found the tyre-print of your Morgan. I didn't know it was a Morgan, of course, but one wheel print at right angles to the road proved it a three-wheeler. You pushed it end-on into the side of the way, and my luck had arranged a damp patch for the wheel to rest in. I had eighteen inches of track, and there was a beautiful imprint. I left that lane looking for a three-wheeled car with a new Clincher tyre on the driving wheel out of which three studs were missing. Back at the village, I lounged about and got into conversation with the blacksmith. 'Motor cars?' he said. 'No, we don't see many about here. Three or four a day, perhaps. Of course there's that new one at the Barons.' 'What's that?' I asked. 'A new gentleman,' he told me. 'A professor gentleman. A little grey car, he's got—very saucy—three wheels and a fair goer.' That rather took my breath away. I had never associated you with the professor, but as I had heard at the village that you had been away some days, I cut across in your direction and had a look at your outer drive. There wasn't the ghost of a track, and just as I had given it up you shot into

sight. I was sitting on top of the bank smoking and thinking things out. I just threw myself flat and prayed the gods to keep your mind on your wheel, which they did. Then I went back to the post office and gossipped. No one knew much about you. You had brought your own servants from Glasgow, and they 'kept themsen to themsen,' as they said. But the postmistress had sold you stamps. You were 'fairish old,' white-haired, smooth-shaven, and you shuffled as you walked. That didn't coincide with the doctor. However, I wanted to make certain of the car. I visited your garage for that. Then I played spy—watched you at work with that rabbit; and when you walked across the room to fetch the other—well, you limped. Of course the rest was only a question of dye and a beard. So I came round to the front door. I had a theory, but only a theory, as to why you wanted the cigars. There was this mysterious indisposition that had troubled the dead man. They might be doctored. One has heard of such things, and I have experimented in poisons a little myself. There was also Mr. Beddoes's rather questionable past. In my own mind I hazarded old scores. But that was all pure guesswork. I was anxious if possible to get the truth."

During the latter half of my friend's speech the professor had remained absolutely motionless, his eyes shut, an expression upon his face which I personally found quite inscrutable. Now he looked across at Tubby, his fingers tapping thoughtfully upon the arms of his chair.

"So!" he said. "Then I'll tell you. It is forty years now since the day I first met John Beddoes—John Best he called himself in those days. It was in the Argentine. I had a nice little ranch out there, and he came to my door one day dead beat, begging me for God's sake to give him work. Then he fell across the threshold in a dead faint, and I and Molly, my little sister, nursed him back to health. He was a handsome fellow at that time, was John Best—the handsomest, I think, that I have ever seen. He told a story—it may have been true, plausible it was any way—he told a story of ill-luck after ill-luck, and certainly he was almost starved. He was an Englishman, and I made him foreman, for most of my men were Portuguese, and I trusted him as I would have trusted my own brother. Molly, my little sister, was the only thing in the world I had to love—the image of my dead mother, and the light of my eye. She was only fifteen when I fetched her from a boarding-school in New York to be mistress of the home I'd made for her, and she was seventeen when that cursed ne'er-do-well came into her life to ruin her. They ran away one night, and for five years I used every means within my compass to trace them. Then I got a letter from Chicago saying she was ill, and begging me to come to her. I reached her just in time to see her die, and with her dear body in my arms I swore I'd make him suffer for the devil's work he'd done—suffer as she had suffered; for those five years had been one long torture to her. She did not tell me

so, but it was written in her face. 'He hated me,' she whispered just before she died. 'I wanted *you* so, Tim darling, and perhaps I didn't hide it. I expect it was all my fault.' There were things I found out from the doctor, too——" He stopped and swallowed. "Well, there it is. I swore I'd pay my debt."

He rose suddenly, pulled from his breast pocket a little leather case, and thrust it into Tubby's hand.

"That was my little sister," he said.

Tubbs gazed at it fixedly, and then handed it to me.

"Yes, doctor," he said quietly. "I can understand something about it."

It was an exquisite miniature of an exquisite face: a child-woman, pathetically sensitive, pathetically beautiful.

"For about two years I spent my time, energy, and money in trying to discover his whereabouts, without the faintest success. Then as a systematic search I more or less gave it up, travelling about here and there as the spirit moved me, and burning incense always at the altar of chance. Seven years ago I almost ran into him at Victoria Station. He was hurrying through a barrier that was slammed in my face, and I saw him borne away by a small suburban train to an unknown destination. That brought me back to system again. I scoured the suburbs steadily and unsuccessfully. Last year I traced him to Stone House, and I took the Barons, which chanced to be empty. I had grown a beard since the Argentine.

It was almost white by now, as was also my hair. I dyed them red, and I wore spectacles. The limp was a late acquisition—an accident in Cairo. I am quite certain that never during all the time I visited Stone House did it once occur to Beddoes that we had met before. I have dabbled a good deal in medicine in my time, and I had little difficulty in playing the rôle of doctor. Rôle, did I say? As a matter of fact I qualified at Guy's forty-three years ago, and threw over the profession for my Argentine experiment. Anyway, as Dr. Smeltby, I got into touch with my man, and the creature was at my mercy. He was in an abominable state of health really, although he didn't know it. There was internal trouble, and I played on it. Out in the East I had known a man of many and weird tastes. One was a passion for strange drugs. He had discovered some, so far as I know, hitherto untried combination which temporarily produced a feeling of nausea, general seediness, and internal pain: quite indescribable, but disgusting to endure. The poison was inhaled, or rather its fumes were, and I conceived the idea of treating cigars with it and trying them on Beddoes. They worked excellently, and he looked, and I believe felt, ill enough to satisfy even my lust for revenge. According to this friend of mine, the drug was not actually dangerous, and I pulled the string of Beddoes's misery for over a year. But the fly in the amber was this: Beddoes had the most implicit confidence in me, and, beyond that, conceived—God alone knows why—a peculiar

affection for me. I cursed my weakness. I set Molly's photograph up in my room and swore to it each day that I'd fulfil my vow. And all the time her murderer loved me, and all the time I loathed myself. At last there came a day when I suddenly realised that I could not stand it. He was sitting opposite to me smoking one of those cigars, his face all twisted with pain, and he laughed at me. 'You're a damned good friend, Smeltby,' he said. 'It's been a rotten life. Your friendship is about the only thing that makes it endurable.' I got up, left him, collected some traps, and cleared off down to London. I kept myself posted, heard of these faints of his and began to wonder whether after all my Eastern friend was right. His heart was sound when last I examined him, but there had been one or two symptoms that had puzzled me. I shaved my beard, washed my hair, threw away my spectacles, gave out that the Barons was let to a Professor of Chemistry, betook myself to my own laboratory, and began to experiment on rabbits. Five days ago I hurt my hand and motored over to Bigby to see a doctor. It was there I heard quite casually of Mr. Beddoes's more serious ill-health and of Dr. Munro's attitude. My rabbits had increased my own distrust of the drug. I wondered whether, after all, the poison was cumulative. In any case I thought it safer from every point of view to get what remained of the cigars. Abdul had vowed to me that the drug was quite undetectable by the ordinary methods of analysis, but since there was

a possibility of his being proven wrong as to the ultimate effects of this thing he might be wrong in the other matter also. I motored over from Bigby, hung about the moors until one p.m., and then made my way into the house. Months ago Beddoes had given me a latch-key, and there are no bolts. I had no wish to be caught, and I had a very clear memory of that hall's noisiness. Therefore, as you surmised, I removed my boots, put them, from force of habit I suppose, under the settle, and crept into the library. It was I who stumbled over a chair as I reached across to unlock the cabinet. I had just got the cigar-box in my hand as Beddoes found me. He was covering me with his revolver when I turned. I have no idea why fate ordained that he should fail to shoot before I struck. Possibly the trigger jammed."

Tubbs nodded.

"That was it," he said. "Just fate. I appreciated that."

The old man's mouth twitched.

"At any rate I hit him, and he fell like a log. I was bending down to feel his heart when I heard young Franklin on the stairs. The rest runs exactly as you deduced, Mr. Tubbs, and I congratulate you on your successful hunt. Having bagged your quarry, may I ask what you propose to do?"

Tubby gazed at the miniature he still held in his hand, and flicked his fingers miserably.

"The Lord knows," he said.

"My boy," said the professor, "don't burden

the Lord with unnecessary decisions. If, as is generally supposed, His primary occupation is the administration of justice, I am disposed to think He has a sufficiently bad time as it is. My one experiment in that direction has been a revelation. I am inclined to pity the Deity."

He was examining the nail of his forefinger as he spoke, and he pulled from his waistcoat pocket a small pair of nail-scissors.

"A bit of cuticle," he said, looking across at Tubbs. "You'll excuse me?"

I saw the blood spurt and Tubby's face white and set.

"As to *this* drug," Dr. Smeltby said, "I have no doubts whatever. It has been tested many times. After all, it's very simple and really the only solution."

Athelstan Tubbs sprang up with clenched fists.

"Oh, curse it! Curse it!" he cried violently.

The other stood up beside him.

"Not a bit," he said, laying his hand on his shoulder. "Not a bit. It was coming, anyhow. Don't blame yourself. If you doubt me, search the house. You'll find it empty. The servants are gone—paid off; there's a written account of the whole thing in my secretaire, and my will. My sole reason for delay was—the rabbits. I wished to be quite sure as to this accursed drug. One, you see, is dead, and the other—poor little beast—I was just going to put it out of its misery when you rang. Allow me." He stretched his hand to the mantelshelf and took down a hypodermic syringe. "It is charged," he said.

I do not know what Tubby was feeling, but, for myself, the whole affair since entering the house had seemed like some incredible nightmare. Now I watched the fingers of this extraordinary man smooth back the fur of the shivering rabbit and drive home the needle. Almost immediately the little creature lay on its side quite peacefully. He re-charged the instrument and turned inquiringly. There was a curious strained look in his eyes.

"Perhaps I, too, may be permitted," he remarked. "It eases things somewhat." And once again the little pump emptied itself, but this time into his own wrist.

Then he sat down in his armchair again, lying back in his former attitude.

"There is just one point of humour in the whole thing," he said quietly. "The most damning item of evidence was entirely inaccurate."

"The red hair, you mean?" Tubby said. "Yes, I'd grasped that."

"Must have clung to my top-coat," the professor said sleepily. "I hadn't worn it for over a month. Instructive, my young friend—instructive. They have hung many a man on equally fallacious evidence."

"Any one might have borrowed it, of course," Tubbs returned. "But then, as I said, it was only one gossamer out of the rope."

The doctor nodded, and that was the last movement that he made.

. . . . . .

As we made our way across the moors the

dawn was just beginning to accentuate their dark outline against the eastern sky. A fine rain was falling.

"Probably just one of the few cases," Tubbs said, "when 'whilst of unsound mind' would have been appropriate. It is certainly one when that verdict is the last which any jury would conceive."

"Unsound mind?" I echoed. "But surely the whole affair was singularly deliberate—the result of years of concentrated effort?"

"Exactly," returned Tubby. "That is the point of it. All insanity is concentration—shall we say obsession? But conversely, every one worth calling a living soul is more or less insane."

He turned in at the station.

"I'm sick of it," he said. "Hand over those papers to Baxter, will you? Oh, and give my love to Billy. I shall get the first train."

Baxter received my commission without hilarity.

"It's smart work," he said. "I don't know, of course, on what lines Mr. Tubbs's methods ran, but it's smart work. I confess I wasted time on a wrong track."

"The scarred traveller?" I queried.

He nodded.

"We ran him to earth at Baslow. He was a schoolmaster on a walking tour, with an unquestionable alibi. Of course the doctor was in my mind also. I was just collecting the details which bore on him. And Mr. Tubbs has gone back already, you say? I must look him up on

my return. I shall be interested in comparing notes."

"Really, Mr. Brown, your friend must be a remarkable person. I suppose he couldn't find 'Mandarin' for me . . ?—A Pekinese," Mrs. Dane-Vereker explained to the company at large—"and a perfect darling. Worth hundreds I was told, though seeing that I won him in a half-guinea Tombola for a Cripples' Home organised by the Duchess of Wandsworth and she is the daughter of some Jew millionaire with all his instincts, I'm bound to admit I never believed it. Anyway he used to weep floods when I went away and refused his food. But I lost him."

"Was it long ago?" asked Peter politely.

"About five years—at Turin. I think he got into the wrong train and went to the Riviera instead of to Paris with me. Perhaps he's there still. Naughty boy."

"It sounds a bit remote, even for Tubbs," remarked Henry Scott.

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Mrs. Dane-Vereker resignedly. "Still, there seemed no harm in asking." Her voice dropped to a horrified whisper. "Mr. Spencer, what *is* the matter with Mr. Buck? Is he going to be sick?"

The Master-Printer was clearing his throat serially. At intervals he blew his nose with resonance. The Bureaucrat watched him solemnly for a few moments. Then he turned to the Lady of Fashion.

"He's waiting to begin his tale, I believe!"

"Oh, *poor man!* How selfish of me! Mr. Buck, we're *dying* to hear your story."

Mr. Buck rose from his deck-chair, gave a final flick with his handkerchief, pulled down his waistcoat, hitched up his trousers, and sat down again.

THE MASTER-PRINTER'S TALE

"Talking of grudges," he announced in a loud voice, "it strikes me as a fool's game to pay 'em off and get lagged for your trouble. I've always made a point of getting my money's worth out of them, and that's how I've made my way in business."

THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH BINNS

I'VE often wondered which is the devil's most effective tool—wine, women, or wealth. I rather back the last, but in this story you'll see all three in play, and his holy reverence shall judge, being an expert by profession.

When I was a nipper, my father sent me to the High School at Roxminster, where we lived, and there I first met Joey Binns. A solemn sort of chap he was (Bish we used to call him—short for Bishop, you know), but always in trouble. There was another lad there, Archie Cordrey, as fly as they're made, and me and him used to get up to all sorts of tricks, leading Joey by the nose; and somehow, whenever the devil was to pay, Archie was scarce and Joey and I had to face the music. Deep fellow, young Cordrey—bound to get on in life.

Well, Joey and I left school the same term and started on the same trade—printing—only I was apprenticed to old Bunce of the *Roxminster Argus* (weekly), with half a crown a week for a start, while Joey went with his father, who had

a snug jobbing business across the road, and pocketed his half-quid a week right away, so he used to look down his nose at me. Not but what he was an open-handed chap. He used to pay for my drinks in those days, and I generally used to bring matters more even at pitch-and-toss, or some other game of skill.

Archie, meanwhile, was articled to a crafty old solicitor who had a finger in most of the shady pies in our town. He was in his element there.

Shortly before my apprenticeship was out Joey's father went and died all of a sudden, and Joey found himself a master-printer, with the key of the till in his pocket. For a time he wouldn't recognise me in the street. It gave me the fair pip to see that young chap, with his pockets full of cash, strolling over to the "Three Tuns," in the middle of the morning, like a duke, with his cap over one ear. But I was not going to throw him over for that, and what with a little flattery and a few racing tips I was able to give him, I managed to get thick with him again. For one thing he'd never shy at a wager of any kind, and as he was a fool at cards—and I'd the better head six nights out of seven—I didn't so much grudge his unearned increment. But he'd a nasty trick of "coming the boss" from time to time—and it was riling.

By the time I'd settled down in partnership with another smart young printer, Joey was known for a mug in our sporting circle; and what's more, he was about the hardest drinker in the town. Joey's line of business put him in the

way of it. A jobbing printer, you know, has to go out and "look for work," and the place to look for it, of course, is at the Tap, where you meet the auctioneers who want sale catalogues and posters, tradesmen who want bill-heads and circulars, and on market-days farmers who want account forms and all sorts of things. On paper this practice is sound enough, but you want a head for it, and Joey got to spend more time "looking for work" than he did in doing it. There was only one end to that, and in due course it came.

One night at the Club I heard what I was expecting. Joey was on the rocks. Here was my chance. I heard that Archie Cordrey was acting for Joey, so I went round to him in the morning, and "What's the damage?" says I.

"Not much—a couple of 'thou' or less."

"Well," says I, "Bish Binns is an old pal of mine and I want to give him a helping hand."

"Of course," says he.

"Look here, then," says I, "give me a list of his creditors. I deal with most of them myself, and I'll see if I can't square them one way or another by making myself responsible for the business, meeting some and promising others a date."

"Sportsman," says Archie; "do."

"Only," says I, "you know as well as I that one can't give something for nothing in this world, and though Joey, in this case, would keep his board up and still run as the Binns Press, he'll take his pay from me."

Archie chuckled—he's a nasty chuckle—and

said, "Well, well, see what you can do," and winked.

That was a busy week for me; cost something, too, running round London and blarneying the duns; besides that I had to look for the money first—some of the big concerns there would have nothing but spot cash. Damn it, they've been civiller since. Well, the end of it was I turned up at Archie's on Saturday morning with the thing done. "These I've squared," says I; "these'll take monthly instalments; these'll give three months, and so on."

"Mr. Buck," he says pompously, "you have done capitally. We are all very grateful to you, I am sure."

"Well, then," says I, "I take it the thing's fixed, and that I'll hear from you formally about the arrangement, in a day or two."

"Certainly," he replied, with that odd chuckle of his, and off I went laughing to myself to think of the lordly Bish Binns as my journeyman. Yes, I heard from young Cordrey all right the next morning, Sunday, and this was how the letter went, more or less:

"DEAR SIR,

"I have to thank you on behalf of my client, Mr. Joseph Binns, for your very valuable and friendly services.

"You will no doubt be gratified to learn that as a result of your efforts Mr. Binns will be able to carry on his business in partnership with Mr. Robert Blackstock of this town.

"I enclose the new firm's cheque in discharge of the sums you have disbursed to sundry creditors, and remain,

"Dear Sir,

"Yours obediently,

"ARCHIBALD CORDREY."

My God! how I damned that young shaver; though I had to confess he'd pulled my leg fine. Me a catspaw—and after what I'd said at the Club last night! And Bob Blackstock of all people! He'd got his hands full already with half a dozen concerns which didn't pay, and he couldn't have a penny to put into the business. So Archie was behind them both. For the life of me I couldn't see why. So I just had to bite my nails and wait till Monday. What's it they say over there? "Churches la fem"—yes, it was that right enough. I found out in the course of the week that Bobby's sister-in-law had lately left Roxminster and gone to live in Town for no apparent reason; I also learnt that Archie went to Town every week-end, and what's more used to tease his wife about it. That's the sort of chap he was.

Well, after that Joey wasn't seen about the place during the daytime. Bobby was a dissenter who ate nuts and drank water, and he wouldn't hear of Joey "looking for work." He gave him a fixed screw and shut him up in the works from morning to night. Good for Joey, perhaps, but not for profits, and after a bit the balance sheet must have looked squiffy, for Joey

was allowed to go out at certain times to "look up his old customers." That was all very nice, of course, but Joey had no extra cash allowed him, and how could he "look up his customers" without standing drinks round? Of course nothing was said about that, and Bobby, like the damned moral ostrich that he was, didn't ask where he found his "old connection." Some one had got to pay, of course, and Joey, very properly, didn't see why he should. (He was kept tight enough as it was, and there was always "another expected" at home.) There was certainly more work about the shop, and Bobby, who spent the day spinning about from one of his concerns to another—with intervals for temperance fêtes and nut-cracking shows—left it at that.

Any honest Christian could have foretold him the result. One day Bobby goes into his accounts and finds a two-years' leakage running into three figures. You should have seen him bounce and fizzle! Preserve us from the righteous wrath of the teetotal dissenter. I reckon he did the dirtiest he knew on poor Joey: made him sign a document acknowledging his fault, and undertaking never to work at his trade within a twenty-mile radius of Roxminster on pain of instant prosecution. It was flat ruin for Joey, of course, for he couldn't hope to keep a home together in a strange place where he didn't know a soul, without a reference, and at a time when stray "comps" were asking for work everywhere, and glad to get a quid a week for full time.

It was in May when Joey disappeared, and I

heard no news of him till shortly before Christmas, when I had a letter from him. Just what you'd expect—out of work, wife and four in a single four-pair back, literally starving. Well, I always like to help an old pal, so I had a whip round at the Club, and sent him a fiver with best wishes for better luck. That lasted him six weeks, and then I got another letter saying he was as bad off as ever. Then I hit on a notion. Joey's trade, properly speaking, was "jobbing." Well, I thought, he'd be a darned useful chap in my office, and he'd come for anything I offered if only I could square friend Blackstock. Why couldn't he come as proof-reader? I did book-work, you see, for a young publisher who'd got some fooling notion that people notice how a book is printed—the idea!—and he was always giving me a rousing about literals, fluky composition, or some fool's game or other, that didn't matter twopence except to himself. But he seemed to be cutting some ice, and didn't know much about prices, so I reckoned it best to humour him. Joey, I thought, is just the man to look after his work. So off I went to Bobby Blackstock, and showed him Joey's two letters, and appealed to him as a Christian to let me help the poor chap. I vowed he shouldn't "work at his trade" in the sense in which he'd signed his undertaking.

My word, how Bobby did carry on! "Dirty quibble," he called it, and swore he'd have Joey quodded before he'd done a week's work for me. 'Bobby," says I, "I've been square with you,

but you're too Christian and temperate for me. Good morning," and I left him, thumping and spluttering like a revivalist. I felt I'd give a quid to do him down somehow, so I went off straight to Archie Cordrey's office, slaps down 6*s.* 8*d.* on his desk and asks his legal opinion of the business. "What's the objection to your engaging a free man in a free country?" says he.

"Why this, that the man has bound himself not to work in Roxminster under pain of instant prosecution—you remember the undertaking, surely?"

"Oh, that document!" cried he, with that chuckle of his. "My dear fellow, it's not worth the paper it's written on. *I* drew it up. If Blackstock stirs a finger against Joey now, he'll find himself in the next cell for compounding a felony."

I didn't wait for more. Snatching my cap I dived down the stairs, and the next minute I pushed open the door of Bobby's office and said, "You'll be interested to learn, Mr. Shylock—er—Blackstock, I mean—that the lawyer who drew up your bond with Binns has just told me it ain't worth the paper it's written on."

I heard a yell and a jump, but I was clear of his place and across the road in time to see him bounce out, bareheaded and purple in the face, and rush round the corner to Mr. Cordrey's office.

Later I heard he'd been refused admittance.

After that I wasn't surprised to learn that Archie had given up his week-ends in Town

shortly before Christmas, and that the girl was looking out for a job as housekeeper.

There's only two facts to add. The next Monday Joey started in at my works as comp, and has been there ever since. A few weeks later I was grabbed for the jury at an inquest on a young woman "found drowned." She was Blackstock's wife's sister.

Miss Pogson had not forgotten the Master-Printer's tribute to her own dramatic powers. She considered that some small return was due.

"Oh, Mr. Buck!" she cried, clapping her hands as girlishly as the Dolly Varden hat (now perched rather precariously on her knot of hair) allowed. "It is easy to see you are a *real* business man!"

"Ahem! My dear young lady. . . . I have knocked about a bit, y'know. Though I say it meself, there are not many spots on yours truly. All the same—flattery . . .!" And Mr. Buck rubbed his hands knowingly, with the look of one who has met sirens before and evaded them.

THE BUREAUCRAT'S TALE.

Vivian Spencer stretched languidly.

"My turn," he remarked. "After the realism of Mr. Buck, a touch of fantasy." And he began his story.

THE UPPER ROOM

A RICH young man, called Aelian, learnt the savour of good things and the joy of choosing them; a quiet callousness of nature aided him in the selection of all he found sweet at the moment, and in the exclusion of all that irked, whether of things or people. Consequently his experiments in love were true experiments, guided by subtle calculation and inductive logic; the subject, when any such practice came to an end, would be removed to that outer darkness where there was weeping, perhaps, and occasionally gnashing of teeth, though pecuniary recompense often allayed the pangs of outraged vanity and sudden bereavement. After three years of respectable libidinism, Aelian fell sick of an affection of the stomach, recovering from which he retired to the country for his convalescence. He chose a village beleaguered with very old elms, soaked in pagan sleep and sunshine. Orchards of gilded plum and carmine apple were bordered by cress-bearing streams that prattled away to join the broad river of the Abbeys. A civil family welcomed him to their mullioned farm; his natural good manners quickly won

their hearts, so that they were willing to do anything for him, nor was he slow in taking gracious advantage of this good-heartedness. He made it his habit to lie in the garden full of poppies and roses, sipping the burgundy he had brought with great care from London, and reading Persius or Juvenal. But the profound peace of the country could not long govern his temperamental impudence; so, as his strength returned, he would cast a roving eye round the village in search of more concrete entertainment. He would sit in the bar of the "Beehive," drinking and listening to the remarks of villagers, brick-red from the fields, and was for the most part intolerably bored by their conversation. But one Saturday evening, a young butcher, rendered hilarious by the absorption of a quart of stout, broached with Aelian the common topic of woman. "Ah, we 'ave some fine tarts 'ereabouts," he observed with prodigious winks; "but not up ter the style of a gent like you, I dare say." "Ah," struck in a little bird-like old person, "but the gen'lman 'asn't been over to old Crossland's, I'll be bound." A slight hush resulted from this suggestion. Aelian, scenting an adventure, begged jokingly for further enlightenment. He got many minute geographical directions, but more than that they would not tell him. He held his peace and appeared to think no more about it. The next day, a Sunday, he spent sprawling under a plum tree, with a book of Beardsley; but when the sun went down and pale moths flickered out, he turned into the fields, under cover of banks

still hot from the day, where foxgloves stood in rows. Wicked little bats flew about his head, as he went a lonely mile or more. At last he broke out of a nettle-grown spinney, and saw square yellow lights as of windows. Coming nearer, he found a black and white timbered house with thatched roof, in the midst of a garden whose lilies maddened the air with their breath. He waited under a thick holly-bush, while the night deepened and owls quavered to one another; no sound came from the house, and without all kept ominously still. It was now very dark; great doors of cloud, menacing thunder, shut out the stars, and pressed the sultry air more close. He noticed that the house door was a little opened; some one was expected to return late, perhaps. He watched for an hour, beginning to find it tedious, when he became aware of something. It was as though the electric fluid with which earth and heaven were charged had darted through him. Then he knew most certainly that a new perfume, astoundingly rare and intimate, was in his nostrils—the sweetness that lurks in the thick hair of a girl; there was a gentle rustling, and a touch as soft as the falling of fine dust. He whispered, "Who is it?" but got no answer. Straining his eyes through the intense blue darkness he seemed to catch the perfect poise of a little head, and thought he could hear the ripple of a light skirt. Well, she, whoever she was, must cross the shaft of light from the doorway; but she seemed to have disappeared, perhaps round the back of the house. At all events his vision

passed away, so, filled with curious regrets and hopes, disordered in mind, Aelian strolled back to the farm, and to bed. Next morning, his imagination revelled with enchanting mystery, galloped; he determined to act at once, to initiate a bold daylight attack. The yokels certainly had not lied; indeed, it was more than likely they had betrayed a gold mine. That afternoon he approached the lonely house, light at heart, determined to force some sort of an issue. The first thing he saw was a beardless, thousand-wrinkled old man, whose expression, though fixed in apparent vacancy, yet suggested cunning. His deep-sunk eyes were peculiarly clear and black, and seemed to burn.

"Arternoon to ye," said this curious person.

"Good afternoon," said Aelian, lounging up to the garden. He leant on the green wooden railings and prodded the earth with his stick. "What a pretty garden you have here."

"Ah," answered the old man, and appeared to scrutinise intently the leafy sky-line of near hills. Suddenly he proposed that Aelian should come in and rest a while on the garden seat. Thanking him, Aelian passed in among grey bushes of lavender and scarlet snapdragons, in whose throats the bees drank. They sat without speaking, while the swallows went backwards and forwards from the eaves, twittering and slaving. Aelian listened for and thought he could hear faint noises of utensils, the shutting of a door. At last he ventured on an obvious lead.

"Do you live here alone?"

"Alone? No, no, not alone; dear me, not alone," cackled the old man. "You'll be a stranger here now?"

"Yes."

"Staying down the village?"

"Yes."

"And he asks me if I lives alone." Here he went off into weak gigglings and ejaculations of "Well! well!" Aelian, who was not in the habit of being embarrassed, watched this display of amusement calmly.

"But they're common hereabouts," continued the other; "dirty, common folks. We're too good for 'em, eh? Especially one of us—he, he! A proper young London gent, if you'll excuse me."

Aelian excused him, whereupon his face assumed an expression of immense slyness.

"Young gents doesn't often stroll this way accidental like; particular nice young gent you seem, too, if you'll excuse me."

Aelian augmented this favourable impression by the offer of a cigar. The old man took it with a brown, unsteady claw; smelt, cracked, bit it at the end, and spat the little bits of tobacco out, grimacing. He wished, with secret annoyance, that Aelian would come to the point instead of sitting there like an Egyptian mummy (the old man thought). He intended to have some fun—to misunderstand him, to be scandalised, wheedled, chaffered with. But his senile impatience lost him that advantage.

"I expect you've heard something down the village, now?" he broke out.

"Yes," replied Aelian, with a sweet smile. The situation was well in hand. He picked a bay leaf and nibbled it with relish. Then an inward fire seemed to kindle in the old man, till his eyes blazed like a hound's.

"All that grows in my garden is lovely. My lilies and daisies and sweet willums; my little quiet mignonette too. The young trees are green and gay; but she—why, she's jest made of 'em all. There's lads run away and 'listed—ah! and killed at the war—for want of a glimpse of her eyes; but I'm a-keeping of her in her little warm nest, for him that's to have her, my flower of flowers, of whom the villagers talks in whispers—God damn 'em—as you very well know."

"She seems all that a daughter should be, or, perhaps, I should say granddaughter, or niece? I think you are very lucky," said Aelian.

"Daughter'll do, and lucky's the word. But a chap as could see her would be luckier still, eh?"

"That's true."

"'Tain't easy though; she comes and goes like dew on the hay fields. That's the window of her pretty bedroom up there."

An impertinent wren filled up the pause with a gush of limpid music from a syringa bush.

"So," said Aelian, "many are called but few chosen."

"Ah, for she's a queen, with gold bound on her head; and that's her own hair—a thick rope of it I've seen, so long you couldn't think. Her

mouth's two petals of poppies; and when the Lord made her eyes, He smashed up some hyacinths for the blood to make 'em purple with."

"Man, you've a marvellous gift of description."

"So'd you if you'd seen the like of her."

"I should like that very well."

"So you shall, boy; so you shall—perhaps, that is. Let's have a nice little comfortable talk about that; for it's a great privilege—very great, indeed." He leant forward and touched Aelian on the knee, whispering huskily. "A poor old man must make little arrangements, you know—she's not to be seen for nothing, that's the eighth wonder of the world—little delicate arrangements, you'll understand."

"What do you want for it?" asked Aelian brutally.

Old Crossland chuckled and whispered, and put his hand, with its stumpy yellow nails, on his shoulder. His flaring eyes came very close. Their quality did not seem to be solely that of greed or of cunning: they suggested the disquieting inhumanity of the fanatic; they might apprehend other than tangible things. At length the shameful bargain was concluded; to-morrow afternoon its conditions would be fulfilled.

Aelian slept ill that night, since the pains of suspense were on him, gripping like cholera. He had never in his life desired anything so much as he desired now to possess this unknown beauty. The old man's vehement description of her was written—branded, rather—on his heart. He lay in bed, while every kind of thought boiled in his

brain. He made pictures of her, dressed in this and that. What pleased him most was the thought of her standing up in her little room, clothed only in a coarse rustic shift that hardly concealed her breast; her quick delicate feet on the scrubbed boards of deal. Her hair would be down in a thick yellow cable. Thus he might come on her unawares, though she would really be prepared by the wrinkled Pandarus. Starting, she would turn round, her clear skin grown red as a phlox. He got up, hot and thirsty, in the deepest hours of the night, and went to the open window. A faint wind stirred the plum tree trained to climb the wall; an aerolite swooped down the sky; even as he looked over the dark land, he felt a pitiless goad in his flesh. She was asleep now in a narrow bed, with its ugly patchwork counterpane. Perhaps she did not know yet; or, perhaps, knowing, she had either sobbed or smiled herself to sleep. Downstairs a clock struck one, but he must watch, aching with the want that curdled his mouth, till it struck two, and again, three; then with the coming of dawn and the wild song of swallows he fell asleep. Waking in broad daylight and warmth, he found the fever was not abated; the machine of his mind washed him, dressed him, led him from house to garden, while his inner thought contemplated a lily-white girl with a golden crown, the victim proper for sacrifice.

The old man had hinted that she would be gracious to him, coming as a lover. He thought he was handsome, for he had stared himself

stupid in the glass, and taken womanish care of face and hands. He was sure he was light-footed, slim, well-dressed, urbane, and all the rest of it. This was entrancing certainty; he had but to go and conquer. He would do this gradually, deriving sweet torment from the delay; but after sunset he would take her into the little perfumed garden, decorate her with flowers, whisper to her that he was in great pain for her sake, and beg, as being desperate for some relief. He rehearsed to himself with care what he intended to say, correcting moods and modulations in his mind. But sometimes a wave of stage-panic made him sick. After all, if his nerve failed him, he would merely stammer and look a fool before her. This was a new sensation to Aelian, whose facile tongue had never failed him, nor had he dreamt that it ever should. Thus bemused, he went on his way, drawing up with somewhat of a shock by the green railings. Old Crossland was pottering about in his garden with a small hoe. On seeing Aelian he tilted it with exasperating slowness against the wall, and hobbled up to him, his face devoid of any known expression. He said, in a low voice, "She's expecting of you; she'll be peeping round the edge of her little window. Come in, come in." Aelian was taken with a faintness of his violent expectation, as he entered the cottage for the first time.

"Now," said Crossland, "come along up, and I'll present you like a duke." They mounted the plain wooden stair, and the old man tapped softly at a little green door, then opened it,

standing ceremoniously aside for Aelian to pass in.

Aelian saw white-washed walls and a sloped ceiling, a little white bed, a rag mat, a table of black oak; in the middle of the table a white earthen bowl containing roses. But these were brown with age, and had spilt their petals; a draught from the open window drove them about the floor, stirred the thick dust that had settled on everything, and made the end of the yellow blind tap. The bed was sealed by spiders' webs; dust lay on the virgin pillow.

"Here," said Aelian, raucous with annoyance, "you've taken me to the wrong room. There's no one here."

"No one here?" the old man answered. "Not my lovely lily-girl? Oh, don't tell me that!" He peered eagerly round the room. "Why, where are you, my pretty bird? Oh dear, oh dear, I'm afraid she's never been here at all!" He began to whimper. To Aelian it was as though ice and iron were in his breast; he would neither speak nor move.

"My darling daughter," lamented Crossland; "I could swear I had a daughter! Why, I've heard her move, with the delicate rustling silk on her; I've seen her in the half-dark, passing me with a smile that showed her little white teeth; and now it's not true, and I'm afraid I haven't any daughter after all! I left this room so neat for her—a bower for her very own; oh dear! oh dear!" The old man sat down at the table, and laid his face in the dust, and wept. Aelian

stood there for a moment or two, then turned and went downstairs, for a coldness like the presence of death had killed the desires of the flesh in his blood, and fear pricked him. But as he went down the garden path a tree rustled mockingly in the wind like a skirt of a walking woman.

As the Bureaucrat finished his story, Miss Pogson sighed. Her melancholy was partly disappointment, partly relief; the tale had promised to be—well, *rather . . . you* know. And then it wasn't. The Courier congratulated Vivian Spencer on the delicacy of his method, and inquired of Mrs. Dane-Vereker whether she felt equal without further delay to relating

THE LADY OF FASHION'S TALE

"You will think me horribly Victorian after Mr. Spencer's elusive daring," she replied. "The tale I propose to tell you is moral and sentimental to a degree. I have been wondering how to redeem it, and all I can do is to give it an up-to-date, not to say slangy, title. Here it is—title and all.

THE TUMBRIL TOUCH

HUGH and Jack Blaine went up to Oxford the same year, although there were eighteen months between their ages. When he left Eton, Hugh, with that hint of finality that tinged his manner even at that early age, spoke to his guardian of European travel, of the broadening influence of foreign culture, and old Sir George Mackworth, not sorry to be relieved of responsibility for some part of his elder ward's remaining years of minority, consented gladly enough to the proposed period abroad. He felt himself more at home with the boisterous *naïveté* of Jack Blaine than with Hugh's baffling reserve and he comforted himself (if now and again his conscience, or one of Hugh's relations, reproached him for so readily exposing the boy to the dangers that await a young Briton in every foreign capital) by reflecting that Hugh —uncomfortable to live with though he might normally be—was at least "steady." By this he meant (the pitiful inadequacy of the word as applied to Hugh was characteristic of the old man's inability to read the simple cipher of his ward's personality) that a boy, who at eighteen had himself almost uncannily well in hand,

would not snatch rashly at the sweets of freedom. Mrs. Arbuthnot, one of the boys' aunts, challenged him on the subject:

"Think of the temptations, Sir George! And you did not even insist on arranging a round of visits!"

"My dear lady," replied the old gentleman, courtly but undeniably flustered, "Hugh would despise a wild oat; firstly because of its wildness, secondly because it was not an ear of wheat. The cold contempt with which he treats me and his other intimates is doubtless something still more shrivelling towards strangers."

Within the narrow limits of his comprehension, and for all that his argument was as much self-justification as the outcome of understanding, Sir George Mackworth was right, in the sense that a man sleeping at an Alpine hut is at least *en route* for the peak that he will climb on the morrow. There seemed indeed no chink in the armour of self-centred rigidity worn by Hugh Blaine that could be found by the arrows of drink or beauty. But his immunity was not won by "steadiness," nor even by conscious contempt for the purveyors of temptation. Not only did he not repel, nor even avoid, the lures of wine, women, or song; he was not aware of their existence. The only habit acquired during his *Wanderjahr* that could conceivably be considered vicious, was the habit of gambling and this, from the very beginning, he practised with a tense control of emotion more suggestive of experimental science than of a craving for excitement.

No doubt the wall of haughty aloofness, that stood just behind the outworks of Hugh's social courtesy and guarded the citadel of his secret and passionate convictions, was more evident during the youthful years spent in his brother's company than later in his life. Eton compared the two; Oxford did the same. Do not imagine, however, that they formed the usual contrast of studious prig and genial idler. Born into a class where good manners and good clothes were essential, wit and wealth valuable accessories, moral virtues and liberal ideas dispensable if not positively undesirable, both Hugh and Jack Blaine passed with honours the standard of their world. Both were well dressed (Hugh with sombre richness, Jack with coloured and lavish comfort); both were well mannered (Hugh treated his equals with graceful ceremony, his inferiors with curt politeness, while Jack charmed high and low alike by the genial familiarity of one who knows himself popular); both were intelligent; both had large allowances; neither was aggressive in virtue or idealism. Superficially they were typical members of the English aristocracy: one a little grave, the other a little riotous. But there was between them a deep and vital difference which lay in the manner of their interpretation of life. Jack took fun and friendship with careless eagerness, living every moment of every day, uncritical, unself-conscious; Hugh, behind a double mask—first of the nonchalant reserve demanded by conventional politeness and then of the nervous pride to which I

have already referred—cherished with an intense devotion his belief in nobility, his conception of the supremacy and the duty of the aristocrat.

"Hugh makes me feel crudely modern," said another of his aunts (and the company applauded her phrasing), "as though I were a bathroom or a well-grate thrust by a parvenu into an ancient house."

General Roscar, an old friend of the boys' dead parents, was blunter and less perceptive:

"Hugh is for ever on his dignity and it's such a damned narrow pedestal there's no room for any one else!"

Almost without exception the Blaine relations and family friends preferred the younger brother to the elder. He was "more their sort." Nevertheless there was one exception—and an important one. Old Lady Shrivenham, the boys' great-aunt, grew shrill and angry in her defence of Hugh.

"The boy is the only aristocrat among you! Jack Blaine, with his loud tweeds, his chorus girls, his Jewish friends, is the type you are evolving in your compromise with revolution. When I was a girl I learnt that breeding cannot compromise with the mob. You hope to save yourselves, to share the upper room with trading millionaires and labour leaders. And you, Shrivenham, grinning there, are the worst of the bunch!"

As she tossed her head and tapped the floor with her gold-handled stick, her son would assure her that he smiled in admiration, and would turn the subject. Nor did he altogether lie, although out

of her hearing he occasionally made fun of her a little, for he was a modern earl who scented the class war and hoped to save at least himself and his children from eclipse by well-judged concessions. He found his mother admirable and stimulating, while she kept her views to her own circle. But if she were allowed to fly the flag of caste too publicly, and so provide the watchful enemies of rank with excuse for gross and embarrassing attacks, his own careful policy would crumble to the dust it was. So he humoured the old lady while keeping an eye open for emergencies. The matter of Hugh Blaine seemed altogether trivial. So long as maternal extremism concerned itself merely with family psychology, he could ignore it and continue to ask Radicals to dinner, to keep silence in the House of Lords, to mend his cottages, and to hold as little land and as many sound non-industrial shares as entails and mortgages allowed.

It occurs to me that I am tending to overstress the importance of Hugh and Jack in the minds of their relations. I am only anxious to make clear in what the elder differed from the younger, because on that difference turns the *dénouement* of my tale. At the time they went to Oxford—Hugh was nearly twenty, Jack just eighteen—they were unmistakable Etonians, known as cousins of the Earl of Shrivenham, well-to-do and pleasantly undistinguished. They found their level with the mysterious rapidity that is Oxford's secret. Their respective sets were characteristic—alike, yet subtly different. Both

were members of the Bullingdon by the beginning of their second year; both went out with the drag; both hunted; Hugh played polo; Jack drove his fast tandem. But Hugh was unknown to the proctors or to the dean of his college, while Jack soon won a reputation for wildness of the kind that appears to stir to amused admiration rather than to reproof the great majority of disciplinarian dons. His eighteen months abroad had given Hugh a certain width of experience, which, when added to his natural severity of demeanour, made him in mind several, and in manner many years older than the run of his contemporaries. He leaned to politics, but avoided the promiscuous arena of the Union, devoting his energies to the revival of two high Tory clubs, which were fast sinking into decadence, owing, no doubt, to the panic-tendency of the hereditary Conservative (so forcibly remarked upon by the Dowager Lady Shrivenham) to meet Liberalism, and even Labour, half way. Hugh, over admirable port and at gleaming mahogany tables in Oxford rooms and in the country houses of the neighbourhood, prepared to fight that losing fight for privilege, which, as you will see, tempered with fineness the irony and even the absurdity of what was to occur. At Christ Church, as at Eton, Hugh was a man of few intimate friends. His enthusiasm was not of a kindling type; incapable himself of compromise, he made no attempt to conceal his scorn for compromise in others. His belief in aristocracy was a belief in duty and uprightness; his loyalty

to the king a blind and passionate conviction which took no heed of personal shortcomings, which regarded the pomp and sanctity of kingship as inherent and natural, and therefore as no matter for sentiment or extravagant assertion. An amiable and decorative society, engaged in keeping alive the memory of Charles the Martyr, invited his membership. But one experience of a club dinner was enough. "They are not Royalists," Hugh said afterwards, "they are king-makers." In his view, service was an obliteration of self. Time after time he would think to have found in some new acquaintance—now one of the younger dons, now a fellow undergraduate—a kindred spirit who was ready to devote a lifetime to the maintenance of aristocracy. But one grew tired and fell away, another sought only for self-advertisement, a third shrank from braving a hostile world; and Hugh Blaine, with a sneer on his thin lips, would leave them without a word and turn inwards once again upon his own fanaticism. It was in keeping with his training and his ideals that he should quite naturally live himself in luxury and appear unaware that there were misery and want in the world. He abhorred ostentation; he never spoke of money; but he came of a class that accepts comfort as a right. If challenged, he would probably have inferred that the poor were properly poor, and deserved no better fortune. As time went on he developed a suspicious dislike of the lower orders, which became a dislike of all those whose money matters "showed,"

and killed any impulse to generosity outside his immediate circle that might originally have lurked at the bottom of his heart.

You are thinking, perhaps, that I am trying to make interesting a very ordinary snob. But Hugh Blaine was no snob. He had no need to be; he came of an ancient and noble family (his cousin Shrivenham was the fourteenth earl), and, materially, life could offer nothing that he had not already. He was "top drawer" and he knew it, and the fact that he knew it was the main reason of his solitude. He cultivated exclusiveness, as some men breed horses or accumulate wealth. It was his hobby; one might almost say his livelihood. As a result, he never spoke criticism of others; he merely turned away, and his shoulder was a condemnation to remember. With Jack he was on friendly but not cordial terms. The younger brother lived his three years of Magdalen in a crescendo of energy and violence. He swaggered and drank and hunted and shot, led every rag of any social eminence, respected no man, and added daily to his slaves. Tradesmen, in Oxford and London alike, adored Jack Blaine, with his open-handedness and frank familiarity, although he never paid a bill he could avoid; but Hugh, punctilious in payment and as lavish a spender in his different way, earned everywhere courtesy—even servility—but no love.

And so in time Oxford gave place to the world of adult fashion. Jack was unflagging. He danced the season through, he pervaded Ascot and Good-

wood, he did the round of country houses and shooting parties, he flashed like a meteor from one capital of Europe to another.

Hugh settled in the Albany, plunged more deeply than ever into sombre reaction, played high at his clubs, became a regular and widely recognised frequenter of the great rooms at Monte Carlo. He was soon a fine gambler, because domination by personality was his religion. The brothers were less and less together, for, as Jack rollicked on his spendthrift way, he found it convenient to associate with the type of man which sees in impecunious youth a back door to society, and that type was allowed no place in Hugh's universe.

"Hullo, Hughie! Gloomy old bird you look. Come to a show to-night and give the girls a chance."

They had met in Piccadilly and Hugh regarded his brother with sardonic amusement.

"Thank you, Jack. With whom?"

"Freddy Bristowe and Tetbury and that nosey-Parker Johnnie with the four-in-hand—what's his name?"

"I'm sorry, Jack, but I smell a Hebrew from your descriptive whiff. Also Bristowe leaves me a little chilly. Perhaps another day—if we could arrange the preliminaries . . .?"

Jack was not the least offended. He chuckled happily, poked his brother in the waistcoat with his cane, and, flicking a speck of dust from his sleeve with lilac silk handkerchief, lounged away towards the Circus.

A week later he telephoned. He had a box for a new musical comedy; the two other guests were irreproachable; the Berkeley at 7.30. Hugh was good company when he cared to be, and four cheerful young men reached the stage box at the Cavendish about ten minutes after the performance had begun. As you of course know, it has for long been a convention of musical comedy to give the solo immediately following the opening chorus to one of the subsidiary actors or actresses, and, as Hugh Blaine took his seat at the front of the box, Marjorie Deloraine was singing the first verse of the first song she had ever had in her short but industrious stage career. It was not much of a song—the leading lady saw to that; but it had verve and style, and Miss Deloraine sang and acted with every morsel of her ardent and ambitious little soul. Hugh sat and listened, pleasantly conscious of her litheness and her energy. While his three companions were applauding noisily he leaned a little forward to watch her bend her head and throw a kiss to the crowded theatre before slipping into the wings. She had given of her best, and Hugh liked thoroughness. During the rest of the piece—except for the one or two short scenes in which she took a part—he reflected a little sententiously on the humble virtues of the entertainer, who lived to bring pleasure to his (or her) superiors.

He returned to his musings about 4 a.m., at which hour he awoke suddenly with a skirl of dream music in his ears. Marjorie Deloraine,

with her mop of short dark hair, her twinkling feet, her piquant air of demure impertinence, danced across the darkness as, a few hours before, she had danced across the brilliance of the Cavendish stage. Hugh found himself wondering whether she could sing the same song night after night without losing some at least of the freshness of the opening performance. From this reflection he passed to austere sympathy for all young girls exposed to the fatigues, and worse, of stage life. He had never before regarded the men and women that, when he chose, gave him three hours' distraction for half a guinea as other than automata. Even so he had been more honourable than the majority of his class, to whom stage men were rank outsiders and stage women pretty toys. But in his present mood of sleepy sentimentality he went much farther than ever before: he conceived for the first time the possibility that his idle amusement might be positively harmful to a whole section of society. The new angle of vision intrigued him a little. Just as a conscientious social worker might derive an uneasy thrill from a night of reckless dissipation, so Hugh Blaine felt a strange and not unpleasing stimulus from the idea that there were people in the world who regarded him and his kind only as sources of largesse or danger, and were not unjustified in denying the inherent superiority of the thousand over the million, which was his own guiding faith. At this point his original self reacted nervously. He jibbed away from a thought that suggested liberal

or even socialist implications, and, in his recoil from the general, found himself once more face to face with the particular in the provocative guise of Marjorie Deloraine.

You know, of course, what happened next. He went to see her again: furtively, a little shamefaced at the childishness (as he conceived it) of his fad. Then again, less furtively. Then again and again. And each time his shyness in the face of the old Hugh paled, and in its place spread the rosy flush of a deepening interest in an obscure actress who played in an ordinary musical comedy.

Gradually he began to analyse this interest. Was it pity? Was it admiration? When at last he asked himself: Was it love? the romance of Hugh Blaine had entered upon its second stage. To you experienced and hardened lovers (here a slight embarrassment was noticeable on the part of the Schoolmarm, while the Master-Printer snorted audibly) I need not dilate on the maturing of that second stage. It was about three months from his first sight of her that Hugh Blaine finally succumbed to the desire for personal acquaintance. Three months was not bad going, for in matters of the heart Hugh was of an infantile absurdity. He discovered this himself when he came to consider ways and means. What did one do in order to make the acquaintance of an actress? Almost he cursed his own past shrinking from the vulgarity of promiscuous amours, for there is nothing more galling to the dignified than ignorance of the procedure of a society considered inferior. He could not bring

himself to ask Jack; he would not stoop to bandy words with a stage-door keeper. For some days he vacillated. Then he heard that the run of the piece in which she played was nearly at an end. The crisis stirred him to action; he ventured a note by the hand of a theatre attendant. On his way to her dressing-room after the performance—her reply had been non-committal, but by a desperate man construable into an invitation—as he groped his way with nervous self-consciousness along strange barren corridors and up narrow stairs, he was forced to squeeze to one side more than once in order to let pass groups of girls who flocked laughing towards the exit. Under their bold, curious, and, as he thought, mocking eyes, his pride and self-possession ebbed and ebbed. Then, quite suddenly, he saw Jack — Jack, unmistakably, in evening dress with a perfect button-hole—emerging from a door some distance down the passage. Involuntarily Hugh stopped. When his brother took the opposite direction he could have gasped with relief; the humiliation would have been too much. But his relief soon gave way to astonishment when his call-boy guide stopped at the door from which Jack had so recently emerged, and, after a moment of inquiry, ushered Hugh into the presence of Miss Deloraine. The third and final stage of his infatuation had begun.

Being what he was, Hugh Blaine, now that for the first time he loved a woman for her sex, did not realise the fact. If he was too fine ever to have thought of women as mere playthings, he

was also too obstinate an heir to his traditions ever to have respected their intelligence. In normal circumstances his relations with Marjorie Deloraine would have been merely fatuous and would have terminated abruptly in anger or rapidly petered out in mutual ennui. That they did neither was due to the fact that Marjorie Deloraine —to use our cant phrase—was a "lady"; that is to say, she came of a good family, whose income was small but their ideas liberal enough to allow a younger daughter (having changed her name) to use her voice, her agility, and her physical attractions in order to make a living on the stage. Maybe it was more unusual then than it is now, and needed a fair amount of spirit on the girl's part, but she went to work seriously, and her determination to make good, combined with natural pride at a first song, accounted for her enthusiasm on the opening night of the play. Now that she found herself confronted with this grave and courteous but clearly embarrassed visitor (whom, incidentally, she knew to be the brother of Jack Blaine), her breeding came to the rescue. She talked easily and modestly, showed him skilfully that supper was the next move, and said: "Good-night" on the doorstep of her lodgings, with an invitation in hand to lunch with him two days later, for the giving of which she, and not Hugh Blaine, had really been responsible.

Forgive me if, at this point, I forestall a thought of which you are all innocent, but I owe it to Marjorie to explain that she was absolutely—more cant!—a "nice girl." She had met Jack

Blaine one Sunday at a river party, and had struck up with him a cheerful friendship in which each side fully understood the other. A little later, as will be seen, each side made unexpected discoveries about itself, but for the moment the waters ran shallow and rippling. It was part of Miss Deloraine's principles to enjoy the varied hospitalities incident to her career, but she felt sure of her capacity to draw the line in the right place.

Nevertheless, after a few months of fairly frequent encounters, her instincts lost grip of Hugh Blaine. His emotions, long held in check, travelled the faster for their years of suppression, but his outward control remained as complete as ever. He knew how completely he had lost his heart; she did not. When, therefore, one evening in his carriage he declared passionately his love for her, she was surprised and a little scared. Briefly, and of necessity, she bade him look elsewhere, and reproached him for spoiling a pleasant comradeship. This time-honoured cliché drove Hugh back in despair upon himself. He did not speak another word, and left her at her door without a syllable of farewell. For a week he was in torture. The fire that had burnt within him had been refused outlet, and he felt as though the flames of hell were blazing in his vitals. You can kill a starving man by letting him eat his fill of rich food at a sitting; to thrust a frozen limb into boiling water is as terrible agony as any in the world. So Hugh Blaine suffered for the tardy rousing of his affections. He hardly left

his chambers. It was July, and town was empty of his friends. Jack he had not seen for a long while. At last he crawled round to his club. A card-playing acquaintance buttonholed him in the smoking room.

"Great fellow, your brother," he whispered, with an ugly wink. "Got a snug little bungalow near Marlow, and a snug little girl in it. I used to enjoy her song the best of the lot in that 'Cavendish' show."

For the only time in his life Hugh was unworthy of his breed. Let it be remembered in extenuation that he was nervously exhausted by a week of torment. Mastering an impulse to knock the fellow down,

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Saw them, my boy!" returned the other triumphantly, not a little pleased at eliciting a response from so notorious a "stand-off" as Hugh Blaine. "Saw them on the landing-stage of the house, Master Jack loosing the boat, and Miss Deloraine, cosy as a kitten, among the cushions in the bow. I hooked it of course—— Here! . . . Blaine! What's the matter?"

But Hugh had already left the room and was half way downstairs. At home he paced up and down, bitterly upbraiding (and this shows better than anything how far he had moved in a year) *himself* for letting this happen. The incident, as an incident, neither shocked nor surprised him. He knew that such things were done and that Jack had done them before. But that Marjorie should have been driven to such com-

monness! He assumed it was compulsion and not choice. His belief in her purity was at least true enough for that. What could be done? Then he had a pathetic and splendid impulse. On the previous occasion he had merely made love to her; doubtless she had taken his suggestion as the ordinary one—as the sort of suggestion, in fact, that now, in her need or her folly, she had accepted from Jack. This time he would leave no room for misconception. He sat down and wrote as follows, addressing the note to her London lodgings:

"MARJORIE,

"I have heard about you and Jack, and it is all my fault. Let me implore you to leave a position that is a degradation and do what I should have asked you when first I spoke—marry me. I assumed I should be understood. You may not love me, but I love you with my whole miserable soul, and at least, as my wife, your name will be the honoured one it ought to be. Think it over. Do not reply hastily. I am always ready.

"HUGH BLAINE."

Two days later an event occurred that was to put altogether from his mind the fact that he received no answer to his letter. In a swirl of treacherous current, by their own rashness or by that of their sailor guides (the real reason for the calamity was never known), the Earl of Shrivenham, his wife, his five children, and several

intimate friends were drowned in a northern sea. They were spending some weeks of the summer in the Shrivenham yacht and had put off from her—a cheerful family party in two boats—to explore some caves in the cliffs of an island off Spitzbergen. Presumably the tide was miscalculated, or, as I said, unsuspected currents were encountered. In any case, they never returned. The search party from the yacht found fragments of the boats, some floating caps, a map, a walking stick, swinging idly on the surface of the sea.

Naturally the sensation in London was considerable. Every paper had an article on the distinguished history and long standing of the family, illustrated with portraits of the dead earl, of his wife, of his three young sons and two small daughters. Finally (and here I do not flatter myself that you are taken unawares), great prominence was given to the succession to the title of the late Lord Shrivenham's cousin, Hugh Blaine, Esquire, of the Albany, Piccadilly, W. But the effect on the public was as nothing compared with that produced on the new earl by the tragedy that had overtaken his cousin's family. He had felt no extravagant affection for the dead man, whom he had always a little despised for his readiness to temper his birthright to the wind of democracy. Hugh was worthy of his great-aunt's admiration. In this moment of succession to nobility of name, to social prominence, to that established splendour which is so much more than mere wealth, all the dreams and ideas of the past became realities. He saw

himself in a position to do more than work for the maintenance of aristocracy; he could now force submission to his views by his own life of every day. Unfortunately, with the revival of his old beliefs and the opportunity of carrying private theory into public practice, came a revival of the more childish elements in their composition. Secretly he had been accustomed to read of the manners of the *ancien régime* in France, of the triumphant nonchalance with which that aristocracy went to its doom in the turmoil of the Terror. Restrainedly he had practised this nonchalance in his life as private gentleman; now that he was a public character, a social figurehead, he gave this essentially theatrical tendency full play. He walked the streets with conscious hauteur, believing that all who saw him would recognise in his bearing and natural dignity one of the great ones of the earth. From the great Shrivenham pew at Dauntney Abbas he would let his eyes wander in melancholy absorption over the humble worshippers, while on the oak balustrade he drooped an elegant and languid hand. Few things pleased him more than to drive through the villages surrounding Dauntney Park, receiving the salutes and curtsies of the peasantry with a condescending stateliness that impressed his simple tenants vastly, but moved irreverent tourists from advanced London or university circles to blasphemous ridicule.

I am anticipating. Perhaps I am fond enough of Hugh Blaine to wish to pass over as rapidly as possible the foolish affectations that marred

the otherwise genuine dignity of his assumption of a coronet. For the purposes of my story let us leave them, and return to an incident occurring early on during the weeks of feverish activity which marked the actual succession. Hugh—besieged by solicitors, Inland Revenue officials, congratulatory and diplomatic mothers —shut himself obstinately in his rooms and refused admittance to all visitors not on the appointment schedule drawn up by his newly acquired secretary. He was therefore predisposed to annoyance by sounds of altercation and footsteps in the hall, when, without ceremony, the door of his library was thrown open by his brother Jack. Hugh raised his eyebrows:

"Well?" He made no attempt to rise from his chair.

The bitter coldness of the reception was like a blow in the face. Jack stared in amazement; his easy posture of greeting petrified into awkward angularity. The oddity of this welcome after the three months during which he had not seen his brother disconcerted even his ready geniality.

"Congratulations, old man!" he said at last. "Thought I'd run in and see if I could help at all."

Hugh was already more than cured of the strange intoxication with Miss Deloraine. If he recalled his love at all, it was with the uncomfortable disgust of a man viewing some sordid detail of his early life. Once more his own personality, as representative of a type, had absorbed his mind, and it was not surprising that

the incident of his passionate interlude, which remained with him forcibly, was that which contrasted most strongly with his present sense of rectitude. When he saw Jack he saw a man who had publicly lowered the Earl of Shrivenham by living shamelessly with a harlot in a riverside bungalow. Poor Hugh! There was all the pathos of an arid fanaticism in his one-sided oblivion. That he himself had loved the girl, that Jack, when seen on the Thames bank, was brother, not of the Earl of Shrivenham, but only of Hugh Blaine, that his present angry contempt for the man before him was no moral indignation but purely selfish vanity—all these truths did not exist for him. He had at least the power of living thoroughly his part in life.

"Thoughtful, as always, I see," he replied viciously. "Did you perchance also 'run in' to see if there were any pickings for a prodigal?"

Jack flushed, and his moment of gaucherie was past.

"What the devil do you mean?"

With a sneering smile Hugh turned back to the papers on his desk.

"Only that concubines are expensive luxuries," he said drily.

Jack behaved very well. He was furiously angry, but stood upright and spoke levelly.

"Some day you will apologise for that, Hugh. You are my brother, and I know that mud is not your usual spittle; so I shall wait till you are yourself again. I shall wait, but I shall not forget." And he left the room without a glance

at his brother, who bent over his desk as though unconscious of having been spoken to.

There is not much more to tell. Hugh spent the winter in the country. He felt the need of some quiet months in which to perfect his own attitude to the new life, and the stately solitude of Dauntney Park suited his mood. His great-aunt summoned him once to London and told him to think about marriage.

"The family must go on," she said. "Poor Archie, with all his bourgeois nonsense, had three sons. Choose a wife who will give you children, Hugh, and whose blood will not disgrace your own."

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve Lord Shrivenham sat by his study fire and considered with solemn objectivity the maintenance of his house.

"Yes?" he said absently, in answer to a knock.

"A lady wishes to see you, my lord."

"Who is she?"

"She refuses her name, my lord, but says you will wish to hear what she has to say."

Perhaps his head was fuller than usual of thoughts of womanhood; perhaps, in his queer fatalistic way, he wondered if this visit had bearing on the problem that tormented him. He said the lady might be brought to him. As the door reopened to admit her, he rose and advanced to the writing-table that stood under one of the great windows facing the southern sky. The afternoon was dark and cold, and, as the visitor

crossed the room with her face in shadow, he received an impression only of slightness and of elegant self-possession.

"Good afternoon, Hugh," she said, in an even and business-like voice. "I have come to remind you of something."

As she spoke she raised her veil and turned towards the fading light. He felt he had known from the first that the stranger was Marjorie Deloraine. The sight of her caused him no surprise, no twinge of excitement, no impulse of curiosity. She was grey ash from the dead past. He bowed haughtily and waited. From her bag she took an envelope, and from the envelope a blue sheet of letter paper. Her eyes were hard and covetous.

"You have perhaps forgotten writing this to me? It is an offer of marriage signed by Hugh Blaine. 'I am always ready!' 'Always' is a long time, Lord Shrivenham, but a promise does not wear out."

He took the letter mechanically and stood holding the sheet of paper in one hand, while the other, with its beautiful slim fingers, rested motionless on the edge of the writing-table. He did not look at Miss Deloraine; his eyes were on the fatal letter; but he was not reading what he already felt he could never have forgotten; he was reliving those weeks of slow awakening, those days of gathering excitement, those minutes of passionate declaration in the warm secrecy of his brougham. Once again he felt the utter weariness of her refusal; once again he endured

the week of torture, that culminated in the half-hour of solemn and romantic generosity in which he had, without prevarication or ambiguity, offered his name and his honour to an insignificant comédienne. In those few moments of silence he felt once more the mingled curiosity and eagerness of the first gropings after love; once more he felt with terror and delight the gradual eclipse of self behind the impulse of love-sacrifice; once more he thrilled with the pity that had given birth to the scrupulous uprightness of his proposal. . . . But here reminiscence ceased. The past was lost in a sudden panic and resentment at the dreadful present. The woman was a wanton; doubtless she had been cast off by his brother and was now come to attempt blackmail. Perhaps he was not far from yielding to the anger of the moment; perhaps for an instant his mind played with the squalid details of hush-money; but, if so, there was no trace of surrender or even of conflict in the calm pale face that the girl, provocative even in silence, watched so carefully. In another second the crisis was past: Lord Shrivenham had not lived nobility for nothing. He raised his eyes and looked at Miss Deloraine. His eyelids were always a little weary.

"I shall be glad to know the date you favour," he said quietly. "I would only crave a few weeks' indulgence; there—is so much to arrange."

The girl's eyes softened. Hitherto she had borne herself with controlled defiance; now her body drooped pitifully. She stepped towards him and laid her hands on his shoulders. He

looked down into her eyes, and his gaze was expressionless. She realised with a stab of pain what he was suffering.

"You are a great man, Hugh," she said gently, "and it was flippant shallowness to doubt it. We wished to punish you, to make you apologise. But you have won. Perhaps some day you will forgive a very cruel joke."

"A joke?" he asked dully. "I do not understand."

Abruptly she moved away and stood with her back to him by one of the windows that overlooked the park. She could not trust her voice. At last she turned and tore off her glove. Her eyes were full of tears.

"I am Jack's wife," she said unsteadily. "I married him soon after you told me how you—loved me. I was pledged when you spoke." She held out her left hand. On the third finger was a wedding ring. "See! I am telling you the truth. I have been his wife since before you wrote that beautiful letter to me. Only this moment I have realised how beautiful it is. When it first arrived, it showed you thought basely of me, and I was angry. I did not reply, and, of course, hid the letter from my husband. But later, when you actually said evil things of me and Jack came home so furious, I showed him the letter, and we thought it could with justice be used to punish you . . . Justice! . . . The shame of it!"

And so she left him: left him standing with the sheet of paper in one hand, while the other, with

its beautiful slim fingers, rested motionless on the edge of the writing-table.

. . . . .

During the general conversation that followed the story the Psychical Researcher crept over to where the narrator was sitting.

"It is only fair," he whispered, "to tell you that I have guessed the answer. Riddles are my business."

"The answer?"

He smiled charmingly.

"It took me a little while to be sure. . . . But then I remember seeing in the papers your husband's death at Spion Kop. I hope you are now once more on good terms with your brother-in-law?"

Mrs. Dane-Vereker glanced at him appreciatively.

"You are quick, Mr. Scott. I am at the mercy of your discretion."

He bowed.

"It will, I hope, not be indiscreet to recall my youthful regrets at the disappearance of Miss Deloraine from the stage?"

Mrs. Dane-Vereker actually blushed.

The Courier had slipped away. In a few moments he returned with a bland smile.

"I am happy to announce that our enforced delay is over. The yacht will proceed on its way in half an hour. I propose we dine shortly afterwards."

" In that case," said Miss Pogson, " Mr. Turpin must be quick with his story. He is certainly aware of the time it takes ladies to dress ! " She simpered.

Mrs. Dane-Vereker, glad to shake off the embarrassment of Henry Scott's acuteness, forced a smile at a pleasantry she would normally have despised.

" Especially," she said smoothly, " if we are to compete with the gallant memories of which, I am sure, Mr. Turpin has so rich a store."

The Courier extended his hands.

" Memories, dear lady ! Is nothing to be sacred ? "

" Nothing," answered Mrs. Dane-Vereker. " I am inexorable."

" Tell us about la vie de Bohême in Paris, Mr. Turpin," urged Miss Pogson—" if it's suitable for us to hear. . . . "

" I've heard a lot about the Moulang Rooge," gloated Mr. Buck. " Pretty hot lot, up there."

Turpin shivered.

" There are so many Parises. As guide I conceive it my duty to show you what is French and real, not what is artificially prepared for foreigners. It is no boast to say that I know—or knew—my Paris well. But to tell you details would be to lay bare some of my many lives——"

Dr. Pennock came to his assistance.

" I am sure we are able to take a detached view of anything we hear. Make free use of any alias—

even for yourself, Mr. Turpin—and we shall not recognise you. We only ask for

THE COURIER'S TALE."

Turpin bowed. "You are too kind. In that case I will venture—— But what I will to-night confine myself to telling is less a story than A Memory of Paris Days."

A MEMORY OF PARIS DAYS

IN those days I had a score of names if I had one, and I answered to them all. But such details are the stuff of which my private memories are made. They are not only my own youth, but that of a dozen of my friends. In the Quarter, in the little cafés round the Halles, in Montmartre, on the Grands Boulevards, I recall the gesture of one as he drank, the laugh of another, the humour of a third, the boasts of a fourth—and over the vista of my memory hangs a magic cloud of pipe-smoke. How clearly now I recognise the folly and affectation of each one! How dear they were to me! But from this distance I feel that I loathe that past of love and torture. Paris haunts me as she used to be—timid, shivering a little, veiled by the fine, cold rain of dawn. And yet her mists have power to wring my heart. At times I long to breathe once again the unhealthy damp of those early mornings, to walk again the Montmartre that I knew—the Montmartre of Adèle, of the Lapin Agile, of a thousand bistros. So much of me has remained in the past that I cannot tear myself away.

We are growing old now. In time those

terraced gardens on the Butte will disappear, those corners, those little bars, that lane in which —under the friendly shadow of the trees—I passed spring nights caressing this or that *p'tite amie*. The builder will come and conquer all. Some day—symbolically—the vast bulk of the Sacré Cœur will fall and crush the little Burgundian church that crouches, rotten with age, below the hill. I used to know nooks and crannies of Montmartre where one could pause and forget that Paris was; I used to know low-ceilinged rooms, cool and homely, where one sat and drank and smoked; studios and garrets where, among friends, one could talk and talk and give no thought to women. You agree of course that women and argument must live apart? There was something intoxicating in the quarrelsome freedom of our lives. We would sit round a table listening impatiently to each remark, disputing every theory, despising those who sought, out of kindliness, to avoid offence. Perhaps it is always right to kill the weak. Certainly those of us who sought to wound by word or thought were respected, looked in the face, defied. And all the time we drank, until, late in the joyous night, we streamed into the street and our argument developed into something like a fight.

Dear enemies of an hour or of a lifetime! Doubtless we share regrets—the trees of La Belle Gabrielle with their naked twigs rigid against clouds like cottonwool; the wild grass of the gardens; the trellised shrubs; the ivy; the crumbling walls. Doubtless each one of you can

even now, on wet March afternoons, taste again the kisses, hear again the laughter, smart again under the nonchalance of some wayward child.

Turpin paused and shrugged. His very gestures had become of twenty years ago. Then with an impatient sigh :

It is time to forget it all. Life must be a grey monotony, and I must carry in my hand the wilting flowers of virtue—courage, faith, charity. Or else, one night of madness, I shall plunge into the roaring town to drink its pleasures to the dregs! I shall go from bar to glittering bar, from gaming-den to dancing-hall, without pity and without anger, drinking as I used to drink, and—who knows?—at the last, when hope is dead, branding with some abominable crime the eternal reputation of the stew that once, better than any other, I loved to visit——

Suddenly the prosaic, English half of the Courier's nature reasserted itself. He collected his thoughts, lost in the mazes of his own rhetoric.

A thousand apologies [he said]. I am treating you to rhapsody and not anecdote. But I cannot separate the action of my youth from its *décor*.

A strange psychology [he went on]—strange and meaningless to the unfamiliar mind. I recall an incident. . . . Barely an incident; a fragment of experience only. . . . There were several of us, all young men, in a Biard on the Boul " Mich "

(we were poor in those days, and "Café 10c." had its meaning).

"I had a job once," said Alfred, whose ambition it was ultimately to be the lion of restaurants more brilliant than the one in which we sat.

"So had I," interrupted little Dumont. "I was *répétiteur* at the Lycée Condorcet. But it was not my vocation."

Dumont was now a critic of literature; provincial papers printed his stuff without forcing him even to subscribe.

A third shook his head sympathetically. Alfred nodded, and, because he had less than a franc in his pocket, sighed, as though to indicate that it was time he went home to work.

"What's the time?" asked the poet.

He was absurd in a café, the poet, worried and self-effacing, with his weak eyes and cracked spectacles.

"Four o'clock," replied Dumont. "Tired?"

"Some day," said Alfred gloomily, "we shall look back and marvel how broke we were."

"Why?"

Dumont sniffed.

"Good Lord! Who cares about being broke? I shan't worry when I can splash down anything that enters my head and know that a nation listens."

"The budding dramatist cares," said Alfred. "Everyone turns down my suburban romance in three acts, damn their eyes! My shoes hurt."

His glance strayed towards his feet, and the

sight of them seemed a disillusionment. Dumont giggled, thrusting back from his narrow forehead a lock of tousled hair.

"Ah!" murmured the poet. "Fame!"

Dumont scolded him. "Fool! What we want, Alfred and I, is the power to force our ideas on others. Babbling of fame! Here we are three of us, with all our ideas and not two francs between us!"

"True," said the poet, and yawned. His eyes, sunk in his youthful but haggard face, were suddenly tired. "True, true. Those ideas of ours!"

But he spoke without conviction.

The door opened. The freshness of the night pierced the stuffy room. Chaume came in—old Chaume, who was as tired of poetry and squalor as is a prostitute of love. With him came the usual pack of women and fantastic students.

"Drink!" shouted Chaume.

In us four, hostile and shabby, he recognised colleagues. He invited us to his table and pressed refreshment on us. The women began cackling like geese. They were frequenters of the Bal Bullier for the most part, noisy and no longer young. The regular clients of the bar sized them up and turned contemptuous backs. Unabashed, they treated Chaume with cynical familiarity, and complacently allowed the students to pinch, tickle, or kiss them when and how they wished. Perhaps it was the least they could do, for it was the students' job to pool their resources and pay, after the party, whatever the women

had drunk themselves or offered to Chaume, or whatever Chaume had pleased to offer to whomsoever he desired.

"A song!" cried some one.

Old Chaume tilted his chair, threw back his head, and, gazing languidly at the ceiling under drooping lids, led off:

"De l'hôpital, vieille prati . . . que."

His voice was a sin. The poet shuddered. While everyone was singing at the top of his voice, a girl came in, and, mistaking the poet for some one else, sat down beside him.

"Good evening," she said.

The poet started and blushed. The three of us, mischievously pleased at his confusion, exchanged delighted glances. The song ended. One of the women near Chaume seemed sunk in thought.

"Anna!" called one of her companions. "Anna!"

"What's the matter?"

"Never mind them!" interrupted Chaume. "Leave them to their vulgar pleasures. It is enough, dear Anna, that you share their beastly trade. Do not share also their amusements!"

"No," replied Anna placidly.

She looked at the poet.

"Who's that?" she asked of Chaume.

"Haven't the least idea," he replied.

The students were whispering over the bill. After some difficulty they settled it, and the whole procession of us filed into the street. All the way down the boulevard Chaume recited his own

verses to the unappreciative stars. Anna walked by the poet.

"Listen, little one!"

"Pardon?"

"Listen. Just now a b . . ."

She put her arm through his and drew him towards her. He struggled in ineffectual embarrassment. But he was a child in her hands and rather drunk. She pressed her greedy lips to his.

"Come," she whispered. "Come with me! I will earn my thirty a day and be a different girl. I swear it. Come——! I *can* do it. I know. Under your queerness I guess you are the devil with a woman. . . ."

The Courier's voice ceased abruptly. Miss Pogson, a little pink in the face, as soon as she grasped that there really was to be no more to this story, groped feverishly in her mind for some clue to its meaning. She felt that, daring as it undoubtedly was, it lacked plot. She was also disconcerted by Vivian Spencer's comprehending little grunt of laughter, which seemed to establish a kind of intimacy between him and the narrator—and this quite regardless of the fact that Spencer obviously disliked Turpin. It had the effect of making her feel outside of things.

"You and I," said Peter to the Courier, "will be able to go over some familiar ground together in Paris."

They plunged into memories of streets and places till a soft jar and thudding beneath their feet

brought a gleam of triumph into the Courier's eyes.

" Ça marche enfin," said he.

. . . . .

After dinner, the party sat on deck and watched the sunset, almost in silence. The minds of some were filled with the tales that they had heard—others seemed to be rehearsing new tales of their own. At length, the freshening of the air drove them below, where glasses were brought and cups of hot coffee.

" Well," said Mrs. Dane-Vereker, kindly, " I am sure, Mr. Turpin, that in spite—or may I say, because—of the little engine trouble, the first day of our tour has been a triumphant success, and I hope that we may enjoy many other days of the same kind before we say good-bye to one another."

The other tourists chorused their agreement.

" If I remember rightly," said Father Anthony, " Boccaccio's merry company were wont to end each day's tale-telling with a song."

" A splendid idea," cried Henry Scott, glancing beseechingly at Mrs. Dane-Vereker.

" Admirable," agreed the Courier, " and," he added hastily, " in case any other member of the party should feel shy, I will myself pave the way with a little thing of my own."

So saying, and without waiting for encouragement, he seated himself at the excellent little yacht-piano, and sang as follows:

THE EXPLORER

I SET out alone :
What seeking ?—Guess !
The philosopher's stone ?
Heart's ease
Or happiness ?
The Island of Avalon ?
The way the wind has gone ?

All these,
No more, no less
Than a byway that will please
My love to walk upon.

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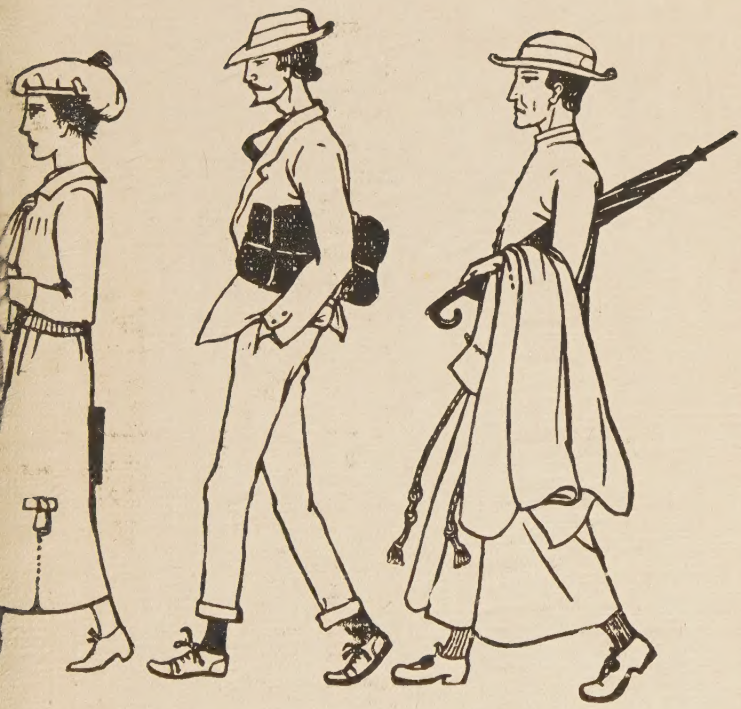

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